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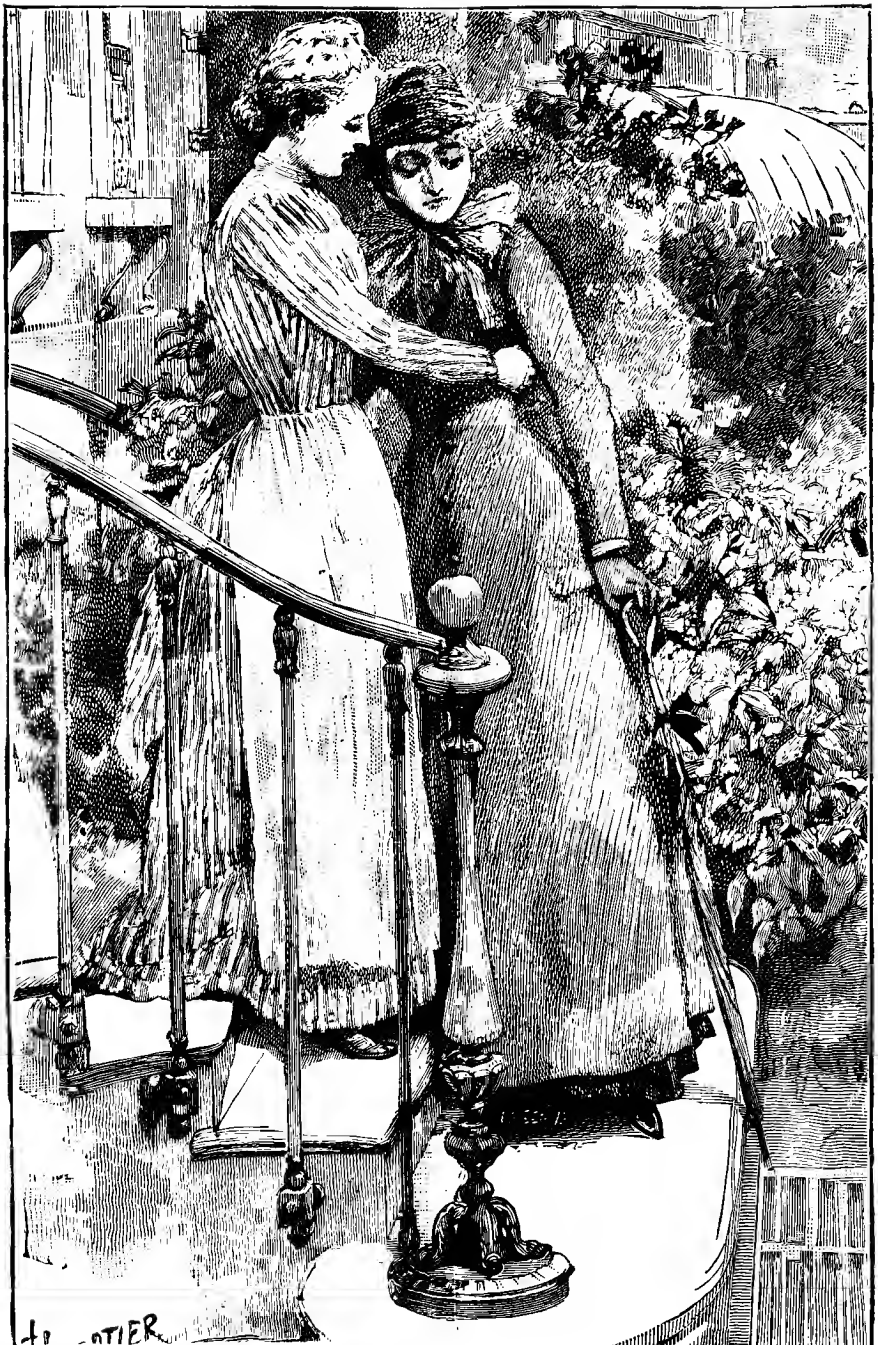

BLIND LOVE

BY

WILKIE COLLINS

WITH A PREFACE BY WALTER BESANT AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. FORESTIER

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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BLIND LOVE

CHAPTER XLII

THE METTLESOME MAID

N the evening of that day Fanny Mere, entering the dining-room with the coffee, found Lord Harry and Mr. Vimpany alone, and discovered (as soon as she opened the door) that they changed the language in which they were talking from English to French.

She continued to linger in the room, apparently occupied in setting the various objects on the sideboard in order. Her master was speaking at the time; he asked if the doctor had succeeded in finding a bed-

room for himself in the neighbourhood. To this Mr. Vimpany replied that he had got the bedroom. Also, that he had provided himself with something else, which it was equally important to have at his disposal. 'I mean,' he proceeded, in his bad French, 'that I have found a photographic apparatus on hire. We are ready now for the appearance of our interesting Danish guest.'

'And when the man comes,' Lord Harry added, 'what am I to say to my wife? How am I to find an excuse, when she hears of a hospital patient who has taken possession of your bedroom at the cottage—and has done it with my permission, and with you to attend on him?'

The doctor sipped his coffee. 'We have told a story that has satisfied the authorities,' he said coolly. 'Repeat the story to your wife.'

'She won't believe it,' Lord Harry replied.

Mr. Vimpany waited until he had lit another cigar, and had quite satisfied himself that it was worth smoking.

'You have yourself to thank for that obstacle,' he resumed. 'If you had taken my advice, your wife would have been out of our way by this time. I suppose I must manage it. If you fail, leave her ladyship to me. In the meanwhile, there's a matter of more importance to settle first. We shall want a nurse for our poor dear invalid. Where are we to find her?'

As he stated that difficulty, he finished his coffee, and looked about him for the bottle of brandy which always stood on the dinner-table. In doing this, he happened to notice Fanny. Convinced that her mistress was in danger, after what she had already heard, the maid's anxiety and alarm had so completely absorbed her that she had forgotten to play her part. Instead of still busying herself

at the sideboard, she stood with her back to it, palpably listening. Cunning Mr. Vimpany, possessing himself of the brandy, made a request too entirely appropriate to excite suspicion.

'Some fresh cold water, if you please,' was all that he said.

The moment Fanny left the room, the doctor addressed his friend in English, with his eye on the door: 'News for you, my boy! We are in a pretty pickle—Lady Harry's maid understands French.'

'Quite impossible!' Lord Harry declared.

'We will put that to the test,' Mr. Vimpany answered. 'Watch her when she comes in again.'

'What are you going to do?'

'I am going to insult her in French. Observe the result.'

In another minute Fanny returned with the fresh water. As she placed the glass jug

before Mr. Vimpany he suddenly laid his hand on her arm and looked her straight in the face. 'Vous nous avez mis dedans, drôlesse!' he said.[1]

An uncontrollable look of mingled rage and fear made its plain confession in Fanny's face. She had been discovered; she had heard herself called 'drôlesse'; she stood before the two men self-condemned. Her angry master threatened her with instant dismissal from the house. The doctor interfered.

'No, no,' he said; 'you mustn't deprive Lady Harry, at a moment's notice, of her maid. Such a clever maid, too,' he added with his rascally smile. 'An accomplished person, who understands French and is too modest to own it!'

The doctor had led Fanny through many a weary and unrewarded walk when she had

[1] In English: 'You have taken us in, you jade!'

followed him to the hospitals; he had now inflicted a deliberate insult by calling her 'drôlesse'; and he had completed the sum of his offences by talking contemptuously of her modesty and her mastery of the French language. The woman's detestation of him, which under ordinary circumstances she might have attempted to conceal, was urged into audaciously asserting itself by the strong excitement that now possessed her. Driven to bay, Fanny had made up her mind to discover the conspiracy of which Mr. Vim pany was the animating spirit, by a method daring enough to be worthy of the doctor himself.

'My knowledge of French has told me something,' she said. 'I have just heard, Mr. Vimpany, that you want a nurse for your invalid gentleman. With my lord's permission, suppose you try Me?'

Fanny's audacity was more than her master's patience could endure. He ordered her to leave the room.

The peace-making doctor interfered again: 'My dear lord, let me beg you will not be too hard on the young woman.' He turned to Fanny, with an effort to look indulgent, which ended in the reappearance of his rascally smile. 'Thank you, my dear, for your proposal,' he said; 'I will let you know if we accept it, to-morrow.'

Fanny's unforgiving master pointed to the door; she thanked Mr. Vimpany, and went out. Lord Harry eyed his friend in angry amazement. 'Are you mad?' he asked.

'Tell me something first,' the doctor rejoined. 'Is there any English blood in your family?'

Lord Harry answered with a burst of patriotic feeling: 'I regret to say my family

is adulterated in that manner. My grandmother was an Englishwoman.'

Mr. Vimpany received this extract from the page of family history with a coolness all his own.

'It's a relief to hear that,' he said. 'You may be capable (by the grandmother's side) of swallowing a dose of sound English sense. I can but try, at any rate. That woman is too bold and too clever to be treated like an ordinary servant—I incline to believe that she is a spy in the employment of your wife. Whether I am right or wrong in this latter case, the one way I can see of paring the cat's claws is to turn her into a nurse. Do you find me mad now?'

'Madder than ever!'

'Ah, you don't take after your grandmother! Now listen to me. Do we run the smallest risk, if Fanny finds it her interest to betray us? Suppose we ask ourselves what

she has really found out. She knows we have got a sick man from a hospital coming here—does she know what we want him for? Not she! Neither you nor I said a word on that subject. But she also heard us agree that your wife was in our way. What does that matter? Did she hear us say what it is that we don't want your wife to discover? Not she, I tell you again! Very well, then—if Fanny acts as Oxbye's nurse, sly as the young woman may be, she innocently associates herself with the end that we have to gain by the Danish gentleman's death! Oh, you needn't look alarmed! I mean his natural death by lung disease—no crime, my noble friend! no crime!'

The Irish lord, sitting near the doctor, drew his chair back in a hurry.

'If there's English blood in my family,' he declared, 'I'll tell you what, Vimpany, there's devil's blood in yours!'

'Anything you like but Irish blood,' the cool scoundrel rejoined.

As he made that insolent reply, Fanny came in again, with a sufficient excuse for her reappearance. She announced that a person from the hospital wished to speak to the English doctor.

The messenger proved to be a young man employed in the secretary's office. Oxbye still persisting in his desire to be placed under Mr. Vimpany's care, one last responsibility rested on the official gentlemen now in charge of him. They could implicitly trust the medical assistance and the gracious hospitality offered to the poor Danish patient; but, before he left them, they must also be satisfied that he would be attended by a competent nurse. If the person whom Mr. Vimpany proposed to employ in this capacity could be brought to the hospital, it would be esteemed a favour; and if her account of her-

self satisfied the physician in charge of Oxbye's case, the Dane might be removed to his new quarters on the same day.

The next morning witnessed the first in a series of domestic incidents at the cottage, which no prophetic ingenuity could have foreseen. Mr. Vimpany and Fanny Mere actually left Passy together, on their way to Paris!

CHAPTER XLIII

FICTION : ATTEMPTED BY MY LORD

THE day on which the doctor took his newly-appointed nurse with him to the hospital became an occasion associated with distressing recollections in the memory of Iris.

In the morning, Fanny Mere had asked for leave to go out. For some time past this request had been so frequently granted, with such poor results so far as the maid's own designs were concerned, that Lady Harry decided on administering a tacit reproof, by means of a refusal. Fanny made no attempt at remonstrance ; she left the room in silence.

Half an hour later, Iris had occasion to ring for her attendant. The bell was answered by the cook—who announced, in explanation of her appearance, that Fanny Mere had gone out. More distressed than displeased by this reckless disregard of her authority, on the part of a woman who had hitherto expressed the most grateful sense of her kindness, Iris only said: 'Send Fanny to me as soon as she comes back.'

Two hours passed before the truant maid returned.

'I refused to let you go out this morning,' Lady Harry said; 'and you have taken the liberty of leaving the house for two hours. You might have made me understand, in a more becoming manner, that you intended to leave my service.'

Steadily respectful, Fanny answered: 'I don't wish to leave your ladyship's service.'

'Then what does your conduct mean?'

'It means, if you please, that I had a dutv to do—and did it.'

'A duty to yourself?' Iris asked.

'No, my lady; a duty to you.'

As she made that strange reply the door was opened, and Lord Harry entered the room. When he saw Fanny Mere he turned away again, in a hurry to go out. 'I didn't know your maid was with you,' he said. 'Another time will do.'

His permitting a servant to be an obstacle in his way, when he wished to speak to his wife, was a concession so entirely unbecoming in the master of the house, and so strangely contrary to his customary sense of what was due to himself, that Iris called him back in astonishment. She looked at her maid, who at once understood her, and withdrew. 'What can you possibly be thinking of?' she said to her husband, when they were alone. Putting that question, she noticed an embar-

rassment in his manner, and an appearance of confusion in his face, which alarmed her. 'Has something happened?' she asked; 'and is it so serious that you hesitate to mention it to me?'

He sat down by her and took her hand. The loving look in his eyes, which she knew so well, was not in them now; they expressed doubt, and something with it which suggested an effort at conciliation.

'I am fearing I shall surprise you,' he said.

'Don't keep me in suspense!' she returned. 'What is it?'

He smiled uneasily: 'It's something about Vimpany.'

Having got as far as that, he stopped. She drew her hand away from him. 'I understand now,' she said; 'I must endeavour to control myself—you have something to tell me which will try my temper.'

He held up his hands in humorous protest: 'Ah, my darling, here's your vivid imagination again, making mountains out of molehills, as they say! It's nothing half so serious as you seem to think; I have only to tell you of a little change.'

'A little change?' she repeated. 'What change?'

'Well, my dear, you see——' He hesitated, and recovered himself. 'I mean, you must know that Vimpany's plans are altered. He won't any longer occupy his bedroom in the cottage here.'

Iris looked inexpressibly relieved. 'Going away, at last!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, Harry, if you have been mystifying me, I hope you will never do it again. It isn't like you; it's cruel to alarm me about nothing. Mr. Vimpany's empty bedroom will be the most interesting room in the house, when I look into it to-night.'

Lord Harry got up, and walked to the window. As a sign of trouble in his mind, and of an instinctive effort to relieve it, the object of this movement was well known to Iris. She followed him and stood by his side. It was now plain to her that there was something more to be told—and that he was hesitating how to confide it to his wife.

'Go on,' she said resignedly.

He had expected her to take his arm, or perhaps to caress him, or at least to encourage him by her gentlest words and her prettiest smiles. The steady self-restraint which she now manifested was a sign, as he interpreted it, of suppressed resentment. Shrinking, honestly shrinking, from the bare possibility of another quarrel, he confronted the hard necessities of further confession.

'Well, now,' he said, 'it's only this—you mustn't look into the empty bedroom to-night.'

'Why not?'

'Ah, for the best of all good reasons! Because you might find somebody in there.'

This reply excited her curiosity: her eyes rested on him eagerly. 'Some friend of yours?' she asked.

He persisted in an assumption of good-humour, which betrayed itself as mere artifice in the clumsiest manner: 'I declare I feel as if I were in a court of justice, being cross-examined by a lawyer of skill and dexterity! Well, my sweet counsellor, no—not exactly a friend of mine.'

She reflected for a moment. 'You don't surely mean one of Mr. Vimpany's friends?' she said.

He pretended not to have heard her, and pointed to the view of the garden from the window. 'Isn't it a lovely day? Let's go and look at the flowers,' he suggested.

'Did you not hear what I said to you just now?' she persisted.

'I beg your pardon, dear; I was thinking of something else. Suppose we go into the garden?'

When women have a point to gain in which they are interested, how many of them are capable of deferring it to a better opportunity? One in a thousand, perhaps. Iris kept her place at the window, resolved on getting an answer.

'I asked you, Harry, whether the person who is to occupy our spare bedroom, to-night, was one of Mr. Vimpany's friends?'

'Say one of Mr. Vimpany's patients—and you will be nearer the truth,' he answered, with an outburst of impatience.

She could hardly believe him. 'Do you mean a person who is really ill?' she said.

'Of course I mean it,' he said; irritated into speaking out, at last.

'A man? or a woman?'

'A man.'

'May I ask if he comes from England?'

'He comes from one of the French hospitals. Anything more?'

Iris left her husband to recover his good-humour, and went back to her chair. The extraordinary disclosure which she had extracted from him had produced a stupefying effect on her mind. Her customary sympathy with him, her subtle womanly observation of his character, her intimate knowledge of his merits and his defects, failed to find the rational motive which might have explained his conduct. She looked round at him with mingled feelings of perplexity and distrust.

He was still at the window, but he had turned his back on the view of the garden; his eyes were fixed, in furtive expectation, on his wife. Was he waiting to hear her say

something more? She ran the risk, and said it.

'I don't quite understand the sacrifice you seem to be making to Mr. Vimpany,' she confessed. 'Will you tell me, dear, what it means?'

Here was the opportunity offered of following the doctor's advice, and putting his wife's credulity to the test. With her knowledge of Vimpany, would she really believe the story which had imposed on the strangers who managed the hospital? Lord Harry made up his mind to try the experiment. No matter what the result might be, it would bring the responsibilities that were crushing him to an end. He need say no more, if the deception succeeded. He could do no more, if it failed. Under the influence of this cheering reflection, he recovered his temper; his handsome face brightened again with its genial boyish smile.

'What a wonderful woman you are!' he cried. 'Isn't it just the thing that I am here for, to tell you what I mean—and my clever wife sees through and through me, and reminds me of what I must do! Pay my fee beforehand, Iris! Give me a kiss—and my poor meaning shall be offered in return. It will help me if you remember one thing. Vimpany and I are old friends, and there's nothing we won't do to accommodate each other. Mind that!'

Tried fairly on its own merits, the stupid fiction invented by the doctor produced an effect for which Lord Harry was not prepared. The longer Iris listened, the more strangely Iris looked at him. Not a word fell from her lips when he had done. He noticed that she had turned pale: it seemed to be almost possible that he had frightened her!

If his bird-witted brains could have coupled cause and effect, this was exactly

the result which he might have anticipated. She was asked to believe that a new system of medical practice had been invented by such a person as Mr. Vimpany. She was asked to believe that an invalid from a foreign hospital, who was a perfect stranger to Lord Harry, had been willingly made welcome to a bedroom at the cottage. She was asked to believe that this astounding concession had been offered to the doctor as a tribute of friendship, after her husband had himself told her that he regretted having invited Vimpany, for the second time, to become his guest. Here was one improbable circumstance accumulated on another, and a clever woman was expected to accept the monstrous excuses, thus produced, as a trustworthy statement of facts. Irresistibly, the dread of some evil deed in secret contemplation cast its darkening presence on the wife's mind. Lord Harry's observation had not misled him, when

he saw Iris turn pale, and when the doubt was forced on him whether he might not have frightened her.

'If my explanation of this little matter has satisfied you,' he ventured to resume, 'we need say no more about it.'

'I agree with you,' she answered, 'let us say no more about it.' Conscious, in spite of the effort to resist it, of a feeling of oppression while she was in the same room with a man who had deliberately lied to her, and that man her husband, she reminded Lord Harry that he had proposed to take a walk in the garden. Out in the pure air, under the bright sky, she might breathe more freely. 'Come to the flowers,' she said.

They went to the garden together—the wife fearing the deceitful husband: the husband fearing the quick-witted wife.

Watching each other like two strangers they walked silently side by side, and looked

now and then at the collection of flowers and plants. Iris noticed a delicate fern which had fallen away from the support to which it had been attached. She stopped, and occupied herself in restoring it to its place. When she looked round again, after attending to the plant, her husband had disappeared, and Mr. Vimpany was waiting in his place.

CHAPTER XLIV

FICTION: IMPROVED BY THE DOCTOR

'WHERE is Lord Harry?' Iris asked.

The reply startled her: 'Lord Harry leaves me to say to your ladyship, what he has not had resolution enough to say for himself.'

'I don't understand you, Mr. Vimpany.'

The doctor pointed to the fern which had just been the object of Lady Harry's care.

'You have been helping that sickly plant there to live and thrive,' he said, 'and I have felt some curiosity in watching you. There is another sickly plant, which I have undertaken to rear if the thing can be done.

My gardening is of the medical kind—I can only carry it on indoors—and whatever else it may be, I tell you plainly, like the outspoken sort of fellow I am, it's not likely to prove agreeable to a lady. No offence I hope? Your humble servant is only trying to produce the right sort of impression—and takes leave to doubt his lordship in one particular.'

'In what particular, sir?'

'I'll put it in the form of a question, ma'am. Has my friend persuaded you to make arrangements for leaving the cottage?'

Iris looked at Lord Harry's friend without attempting to conceal her opinion of him.

'I call that an impertinent question,' she said. 'By what right do you presume to inquire into what my husband and I may, or may not, have said to each other?'

'Will you do me a favour, my lady? Or,

if that is asking too much, perhaps you will not object to do justice to yourself. Suppose you try to exercise the virtue of self-control?'

'Quite needless, Mr. Vimpany. Pray understand that you are not capable of making me angry.'

'Many thanks, Lady Harry; you encourage me to go on. When I was bold enough to speak of your leaving the cottage, my motive was to prevent you from being needlessly alarmed.'

Did this mean that he was about to take her into his confidence? All her experience of him forbade her to believe it possible. But the doubts and fears occasioned by her interview with her husband had mastered her better sense; and the effort to conceal from the doctor the anxiety under which she suffered was steadily weakening the influence of her self-respect. 'Why should I be

alarmed?' she asked, in the vain hope of encouraging him to tell the truth.

The doctor arrived at a hasty conclusion, on his side. Believing that he had shaken her resolution, he no longer troubled himself to assume the forms of politeness which he had hitherto with some difficulty contrived to observe.

'In this curious little world of ours,' he resumed, 'we enjoy our lives on infernally hard terms. We live, on condition that we die. The man I want to cure may die, in spite of the best I can do for him—he may sink slowly, by what we medical men call a hard death. For example, it wouldn't much surprise me if I found some difficulty in keeping him in his bed. He might roam all over your cottage when my back was turned. Or he might pay the debt of Nature—as somebody calls it—with screaming and swearing. If you were within hearing of him, I'm afraid

you might be terrified—and, with the best wish to be useful, I couldn't guarantee (if the worst happened) to keep him quiet. In your place, if you will allow me to advise you——'

Iris interrupted him. Instead of confessing the truth, he was impudently attempting to frighten her. 'I don't allow a person in whom I have no confidence to advise me,' she said; 'I wish to hear no more.'

Mr. Vimpany found it desirable to resume the forms of politeness. Either he had failed to shake her resolution, or she was sufficiently in possession of herself to conceal what she felt.

'One last word!' he said. 'I won't presume to advise your ladyship; I will merely offer a suggestion. My lord tells me that Hugh Mountjoy is on the way to recovery. You are in communication with him by letter, as I happened to notice when I did you that

trifling service of providing a postage-stamp. Why not go to London and cheer your convalescent friend? Harry won't mind it—I beg your pardon, I ought to have said Lord Harry. Come! come! my dear Lady; I am a rough fellow but I mean well. Take a holiday, and come back to us when my lord writes to say that he can have the pleasure of receiving you again.' He waited for a moment. 'Am I not to be favoured with an answer?' he asked.

'My husband shall answer you.'

With those parting words, Iris turned her back on him. She entered the cottage. Now in one room, and now in another she searched for Lord Harry. He was nowhere to be found. Had he purposely gone out to avoid her? Her own remembrance of Vimpany's language and Vimpany's manner told her that so it must be—the two men were in league together. Of all dangers unknown danger is

the most terrible to contemplate. Lady Harry's last resources of resolution failed her. She dropped helplessly into a chair.

After an interval—whether it was a long or a short lapse of time she was unable to decide—someone gently opened the door. Had her husband felt for her? Had he returned? 'Come in!' she cried eagerly—'come in!'

CHAPTER XLV

FACT: RELATED BY FANNY

THE person who now entered the room was Fanny Mere.

But one interest was stirring in the mind of Iris now. 'Do you know where your master is?' she asked.

'I saw him go out,' the maid replied. 'Which way, I didn't particularly notice——' She was on the point of adding, 'and I didn't particularly care,' when she checked herself. 'Yesterday and to-day, my lady, things have come to my knowledge which I must not keep to myself,' the resolute woman continued. 'If a servant may say such a thing without offence, I have never been so truly my

mistress's friend as I am now. I beg you to forgive my boldness; there is a reason for it.'

So she spoke, with no presumption in her looks, with no familiarity in her manner. The eyes of her friendless mistress filled with tears; the offered hand of her friendless mistress answered in silence. Fanny took that kind hand, and pressed it respectfully—a more demonstrative woman than herself might perhaps have kissed it. She only said, 'Thank you, my lady,' and went on with what she felt it her duty to relate.

As carefully as usual, as quietly as usual, she repeated the conversation at Lord Harry's table; describing also the manner in which Mr. Vimpany had discovered her as a person who understood the French language, and who had cunningly kept it a secret. In this serious state of things, the doctor—yes, the doctor himself!—had interfered to protect her from the anger of her master, and, more

wonderful still, for a reason which it seemed to be impossible to dispute. He wanted a nurse for the foreigner whose arrival was expected on that evening, and he had offered the place to Fanny. 'Your ladyship will, I hope, excuse me; I have taken the place.'

This amazing end to the strange events which had just been narrated proved to be more than Iris was immediately capable of understanding. 'I am in the dark,' she confessed. 'Is Mr. Vimpany a bolder villain even than I have supposed him to be?'

'That he most certainly is!' Fanny said with strong conviction. 'As to what he really had in his wicked head when he engaged me, I shall find that out in time. Anyway, I am the nurse who is to help him. When I disobeyed you this morning, my lady, it was to go to the hospital with Mr. Vimpany. I was taken to see the person whose nurse I am to be. A poor, feeble, polite creature, who looked

as if he couldn't hurt a fly—and yet I promise you he startled me! I saw a likeness the moment I looked at him.'

'A likeness to anybody whom I know?' Iris asked.

'To the person in all the world, my lady, whom you know most nearly—a likeness to my master.'

'What!'

'Oh, it's no fancy; I am sure of what I say. To my mind, that Danish man's likeness to my lord is (if you will excuse my language) a nasty circumstance. I don't know why or wherefore—all I can say is, I don't like it; and I shan't rest until I have found out what it means. Besides this, my lady, I must know the reason why they want to get you out of their way. Please to keep up your heart; I shall warn you in time, when I am sure of the danger.'

Iris refused to sanction the risk involved

in this desperate design. 'It's *you* who will be in danger!' she exclaimed.

In her coolest state of obstinacy, Fanny answered: 'That's in your ladyship's service—and that doesn't reckon.'

Feeling gratefully this simple and sincere expression of attachment, Iris held to her own opinion, nevertheless.

'You are in my service,' she said; 'I won't let you go to Mr. Vimpany. Give it up, Fanny! Give it up!'

'I'll give it up, my lady, when I know what the doctor means to do—not before.'

The assertion of authority having failed, Iris tried persuasion next.

'As your mistress, it is my duty to set you an example,' she resumed. 'One of us must be considerate and gentle in a dispute—let me try to be that one. There can be no harm, and there may be some good, in

consulting the opinion of a friend; some person in whose discretion we can trust.'

'Am I acquainted with the person your ladyship is thinking of?' Fanny inquired. 'In that case, a friend will know what we want of her by to-morrow morning. I have written to Mrs. Vimpany.'

'The very person I had in my mind, Fanny! When may we expect to hear from her?'

'If Mrs. Vimpany can put what she has to say to us into few words,' Fanny replied, 'we shall hear from her to-morrow by telegraph.'

As she answered her mistress in those cheering words, they were startled by a heavy knock at the door of the room. Under similar circumstances, Lord Harry's delicate hand would have been just loud enough to be heard, and no more. Iris called out suspiciously: 'Who's there?'

The doctor's gross voice answered: 'Can

I say a word, if you please, to Fanny Mere?'

The maid opened the door. Mr. Vimpany's heavy hand laid hold of her arm, pulled her over the threshold, and closed the door behind her. After a brief absence, Fanny returned with news of my lord.

A commissioner had arrived with a message for the doctor; and Fanny was charged to repeat it or not, just as she thought right under the circumstances. Lord Harry was in Paris. He had been invited to go to the theatre with some friends, and to return with them to supper. If he was late in getting home, he was anxious that my lady should not be made uneasy. After having authorised Mr. Vimpany's interference in the garden, the husband evidently had his motives for avoiding another interview with the wife. Iris was left alone, to think over that discovery. Fanny had received orders to prepare the bedroom for the doctor's patient.

CHAPTER XLVI

MAN AND WIFE

TOWARDS evening, the Dane was brought to the cottage.

A feeling of pride which forbade any display of curiosity, strengthened perhaps by an irresistible horror of Vimpany, kept Iris in her

room. Nothing but the sound of footsteps outside told her when the suffering man was taken to his bed-chamber on the same floor. She was afterwards informed by Fanny that the doctor turned down the lamp in the corridor before the patient was helped to ascend the stairs, as a means of preventing the mistress of the house from plainly seeing the stranger's face, and recognising the living likeness of her husband.

The hours advanced—the bustle of domestic life sank into silence—everybody but Iris rested quietly in bed.

Through the wakeful night the sense of her situation oppressed her sinking spirits. Mysteries that vaguely threatened danger made their presence felt, and took their dark way through her thoughts. The cottage, in which the first happy days of her marriage had been passed, might ere long be the scene of some evil deed, provoking the lifelong

separation of her husband and herself! Were these the exaggerated fears of a woman in a state of hysterical suspicion? It was enough for Iris to remember that Lord Harry and Mr. Vimpany had been alike incapable of telling her the truth. The first had tried to deceive her; the second had done his best to frighten her. Why? If there was really nothing to be afraid of—why? The hours of the early morning came; and still she listened in vain for the sound of my lord's footstep on the stairs; still she failed to hear the cautious opening of his dressing-room door. Leaving her chair, Iris rested on the bed. As time advanced, exhaustion mastered her; she slept.

Awakening at a late hour, she rang for Fanny Mere. The master had just returned. He had missed the latest night-train to Passy; and, rather than waste money on hiring a carriage at that hour, he had accepted the

offer of a bed at the house of his friends. He was then below stairs, hoping to see Lady Harry at breakfast.

His wife joined him.

Not even at the time of the honeymoon had the Irish lord been a more irresistibly agreeable man than he was on that memorable morning. His apologies for having failed to return at the right time were little masterpieces of grace and gaiety. The next best thing to having been present at the theatrical performance of the previous night, was to hear his satirical summary of the story of the play, contrasting delightfully with his critical approval of the fine art of the actors. The time had been when Iris would have resented such merciless trifling with serious interests as this. In those earlier and better days she would have reminded him affectionately of her claim to be received into his confidence—she would have tried all that tact

and gentleness and patience could do to win his confession of the ascendency exercised over him by his vile friend—and she would have used the utmost influence of her love and her resolution to disunite the fatal fellowship which was leading him to his ruin.

But Iris Henley was Lady Harry now.

She was sinking—as Mrs. Vimpany had feared, as Mountjoy had foreseen—lower and lower on the descent to her husband's level. With a false appearance of interest in what he was saying she waited for her chance of matching him with his own weapons of audacious deceit. He ignorantly offered her the opportunity—setting the same snare to catch his wife which she herself had it in contemplation to use for entrapping her husband into a confession of the truth.

'Ah, well—I have said more than enough of my last night's amusement,' he confessed. 'It's your turn now, my dear. Have you had

a look at the poor fellow whom the doctor is going to cure?' he asked abruptly; eager to discover whether she had noticed the likeness between Oxbye and himself.

Her eyes rested on him attentively. 'I have not yet seen the person you allude to,' she answered. 'Is Mr. Vimpany hopeful of his recovery?'

He took out his case, and busied himself in choosing a cigar. In the course of his adventurous life he had gained some knowledge of the effect of his own impetuous temper on others, and of difficulties which he had experienced when circumstances rendered it necessary to keep his face in a state of discipline.

'Oh, there's no reason for anxiety!' he said, with an over-acted interest in examining his cigar. 'Mr. Oxbye is in good hands.'

'People do sometimes sink under an illness,' she quietly remarked.

Without making any reply he took out his matchbox. His hand trembled a little; he failed at the first attempt to strike a light.

'And doctors sometimes make mistakes,' Iris went on.

He was still silent. At the second attempt, he succeeded with the match, and lit his cigar.

'Suppose Mr. Vimpany made a mistake,' she persisted. 'In the case of this stranger, it might lead to deplorable results.'

Lord Harry lost his temper, and with it his colour.

'What the devil do you mean?' he cried.

'I might ask, in my turn,' she said, 'what have I done to provoke an outbreak of temper? I only made a remark.'

At that critical moment, Fanny Mere entered the room with a telegram in her hand.

'For you, my lady.'

Iris opened the telegram. The message

was signed by Mrs. Vimpany, and was expressed in these words: 'You may feel it your duty to go to your father. He is dangerously ill.'

Lord Harry saw a sudden change in his wife's face that roused his guilty suspicions. 'Is it anything about me?' he asked.

Iris handed the telegram to him in silence. Having looked at it, he desired to hear 'what her wishes were.'

'The telegram expresses my wishes,' she said. 'Have you any objection to my leaving you?'

'None whatever,' he answered eagerly. 'Go, by all means.'

If it had still been possible for her to hesitate, that reply would have put an end to all further doubt. She turned away to leave the room. He followed her to the door.

'I hope you don't think there is any want of sympathy on my part,' he said. 'You are

quite right to go to your father. That was all I meant.' He was agitated, honestly agitated, while he spoke. Iris saw it, and felt it gratefully. She was on the point of making a last appeal to his confidence, when he opened the door for her. 'Don't let me detain you,' he said. His voice faltered; he suddenly turned aside before she could look at him.

Fanny was waiting in the hall, eager to see the telegram. She read it twice and reflected for a moment. 'How often do things fit themselves to one's wishes in this convenient way?' she asked herself. 'It's lucky,' she privately decided—'almost too lucky. Let me pack up your things,' she continued, addressing her mistress, 'while I have some time to myself. Mr. Oxbye is asleep.'

As the day wore on, the noble influences in the nature of Iris, failing fast, yet still at rare intervals struggling to assert themselves, inspired her with the resolution to make a

last attempt to give her husband an opportunity of trusting her. He was not in his room, not in any other part of the house, not in the garden. The hours passed—she was left to eat her dinner in solitude. For the second time he was avoiding her. For the second time he distrusted the influence of his wife. With a heavy heart she prepared for her departure by the night mail.

The duties of the new nurse kept her in the cottage. Filled with alarm for the faithful creature whom she was leaving—to what fate, who could say?—Iris kissed her at parting.

Fanny's faint blue eyes filled with tears. She dashed them away, and held her mistress for an instant in her arms. 'I know whom you are thinking of,' she whispered. 'He is not here to bid you good-bye. Let me see what I can find in his room.' Iris had already looked round the room, in the vain hope of finding a letter. Fanny rushed up the stairs

determined on a last search — and ran down again with a folded morsel of flimsy foreign note-paper in her hand. 'My ugly eyes are quicker than yours,' she said. 'The air must have come in at the window and blown it off the table.' Iris eagerly read the letter:

'I dare not deny that you will be better away from us, but only for awhile. Forgive me, dearest; I cannot find the courage to say good-bye.' Those few words spoke for him—and no more.

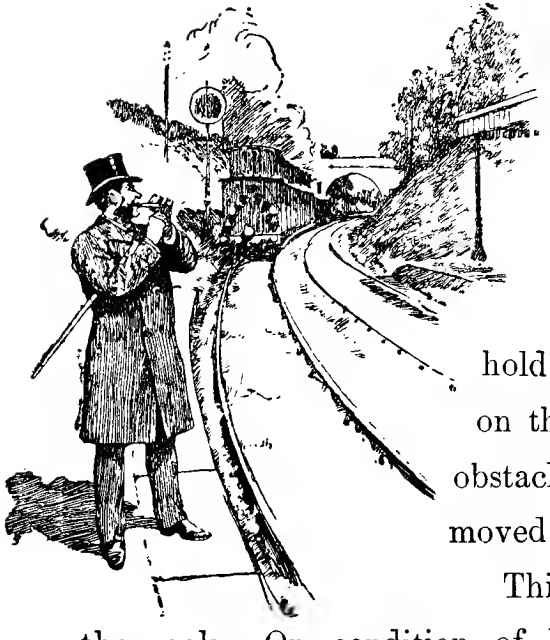
Briefly on her side, but not unkindly, his wife answered him:

'You have spared me a bitter moment. May I hope to find the man whom I have trusted and honoured, when I come back? Good-bye.'

When were they to meet again? And how?

CHAPTER XLVII

THE PATIENT AND MY LORD



THERE now remained but one other person in Lord Harry's household whose presence on the scene was an obstacle to be removed.

This person was the cook. On condition of her immediate departure (excused by alleged motives o economy), she received a month's wages fro

her master in advance of the sum due to her, and a written character which did ample justice to her many good qualities. The poor woman left her employment with the heartiest expressions of gratitude. To the end of her days, she declared the Irish lord to be a nobleman by nature. Republican principles, inherited from her excellent parents, disinclined her to recognise him as a nobleman by birth.

But another sweet and simple creature was still left to brighten the sinister gloom in the cottage.

The good Dane sorely tried the patience of Fanny Mere. This countryman of Hamlet, as he liked to call himself, was a living protest against the sentiments of inveterate contempt and hatred with which his nurse was accustomed to regard the men When pain spared him at intervals, Mr. Oxbye presented the bright blue eyes and the winning smile

Fanny found herself in the presence of a male human being, who, in the painless intervals of his malady wrote little poems in her praise.

which suggested the resemblance to the Irish lord. His beardless face, thin towards the lower extremities, completed the likeness in some degree only. The daring expression of Lord Harry, in certain emergencies, never appeared. Nursing him carefully, on the severest principles of duty as distinguished from inclination, Fanny found herself in the presence of a male human being who in the painless intervals of his malady wrote little poems in her praise; asked for a few flowers from the garden, and made prettily arranged nosegays of them devoted to herself; cried, when she told him he was a fool, and kissed her hand five minutes afterwards, when she administered his medicine, and gave him no pleasant sweet thing to take the disagreeable taste out of his mouth. This gentle patient loved Lord Harry, loved Mr. Vimpany, loved the furious Fanny, resist it as she might. On her obstinate refusal to confide to him the

story of her life—after he had himself set her the example at great length—he persisted in discovering for himself that 'this interesting woman was a victim of sorrows of the heart.' In another state of existence, he was offensively certain that she would be living with *him*. 'You are frightfully pale, you will soon die; I shall break a blood-vessel, and follow you; we shall sit side by side on clouds, and sing together everlastingly to accompaniment of celestial harps. Oh, what a treat!' Like a child, he screamed when he was in pain; and, like a child, he laughed when the pain had gone away. When she was angry enough with him to say, 'If I had known what sort of man you were, I would never have undertaken to nurse you,' he only answered, 'My dear, let us thank God together that you did *not* know.' There was no temper in him to be roused; and, worse still, on buoyant days, when his spirits were

lively, there was no persuading him that he might not live long enough to marry his nurse, if he only put the question to her often enough. What was to be done with such a man as this? Fanny believed that she despised her feeble patient. At the same time, the food that nourished him was prepared by her own hands—while the other inhabitants of the cottage were left (in the absence of the cook) to the tough mercies of a neighbouring restaurant. First and foremost among the many good deeds by which the conduct of women claims the gratitude of the other sex, is surely the manner in which they let an unfortunate man master them, without an unworthy suspicion of that circumstance to trouble the charitable serenity of their minds.

Carefully on the look-out for any discoveries which might enlighten her, Fanny noticed with ever-increasing interest the effect

which the harmless Dane seemed to produce on my lord and the doctor.

Every morning, after breakfast, Lord Harry presented himself in the bedroom. Every morning his courteous interest in his guest expressed itself mechanically in the same form of words:

'Mr. Oxbye, how do you find yourself to-day?'

Sometimes the answer would be: 'Gracious lord, I am suffering pain.' Sometimes it was: 'Dear and admirable patron, I feel as if I might get well again.' On either occasion, Lord Harry listened without looking at Mr. Oxbye—said he was sorry to hear a bad account or glad to hear a good account, without looking at Mr. Oxbye—made a remark on the weather, and took his leave, without looking at Mr. Oxbye. Nothing could be more plain than that his polite inquiries (once a day) were unwillingly

made, and that it was always a relief to him to get out of the room. So strongly was Fanny's curiosity excited by this strange behaviour, that she ventured one day to speak to her master.

'I am afraid, my lord, you are not hopeful of Mr. Oxbye's recovering?'

'Mind your own business,' was the savage answer that she received.

Fanny never again took the liberty of speaking to him; but she watched him more closely than ever. He was perpetually restless. Now he wandered from one room to another, and walked round and round the garden, smoking incessantly. Now he went out riding, or took the railway to Paris and disappeared for the day. On the rare occasions when he was in a state of repose, he always appeared to have taken refuge in his wife's room; Fanny's keyhole-observation discovered him, thinking miserably, seated in his

wife's chair. It seemed to be possible that he was fretting after Lady Harry. But what did his conduct to Mr. Oxbye mean? What was the motive which made him persist, without an attempt at concealment, in keeping out of Mr. Vimpany's way? And treated in this rude manner, how was it that his wicked friend seemed to be always amused, never offended?

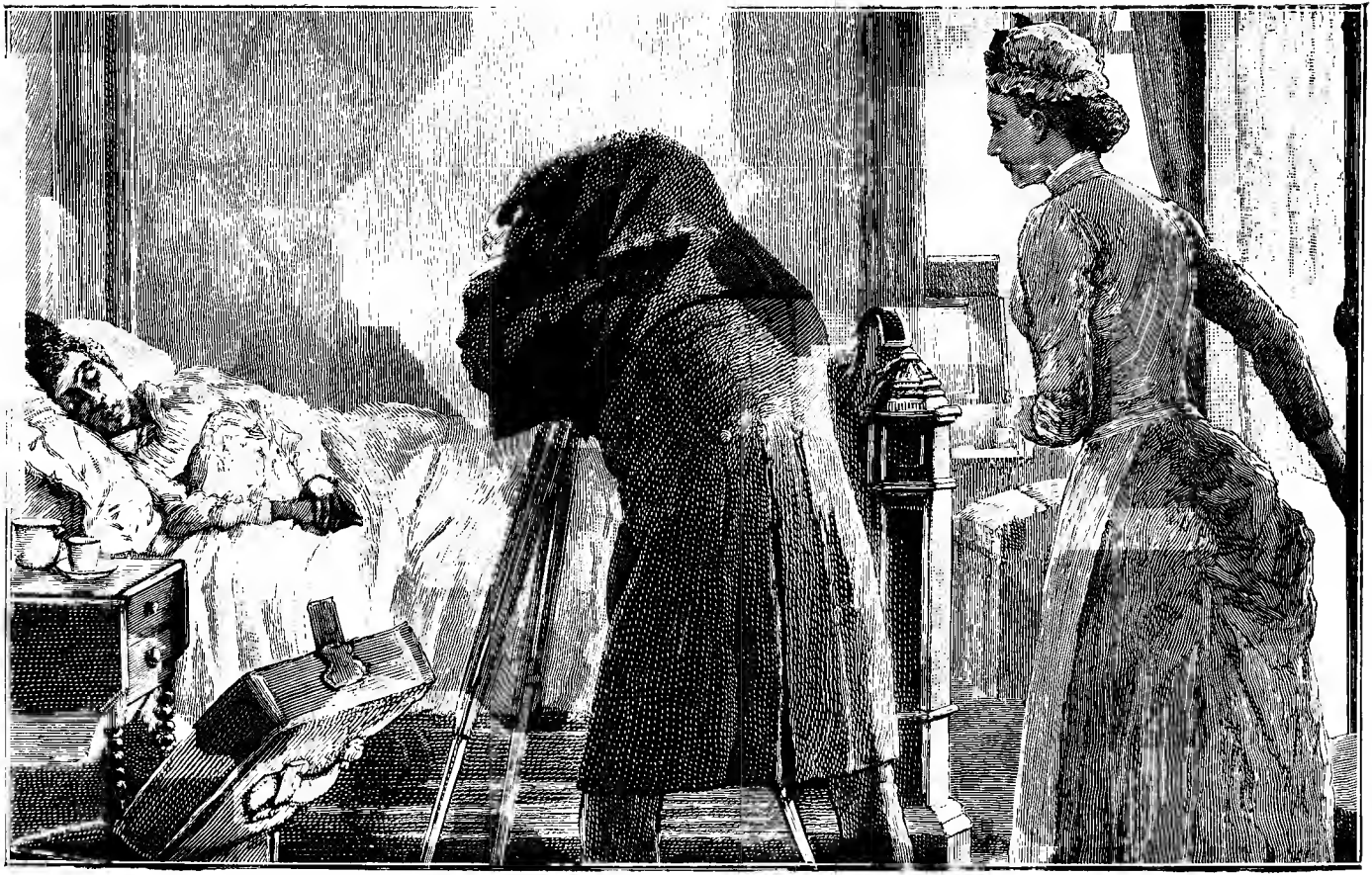
As for the doctor's behaviour to his patient, it was, in Fanny's estimation, worthy of a savage.

He appeared to feel no sort of interest in the man who had been sent to him from the hospital at his own request, and whose malady it was supposed to be the height of his ambition to cure. When Mr. Oxbye described his symptoms, Mr. Vimpany hardly even made a pretence at listening. With a frowning face he applied the stethoscope, felt the pulse, looked at the tongue—and drew

his own conclusions in sullen silence. If the nurse had a favourable report to make, he brutally turned his back on her. If discouraging results of the medical treatment made their appearance at night, and she felt it a duty to mention them, he sneered as if he doubted whether she was speaking the truth. Mr. Oxbye's inexhaustible patience and amiability made endless allowances for his medical adviser. 'It is my misfortune to keep my devoted doctor in a state of perpetual anxiety,' he used to say; 'and we all know what a trial to the temper is the consequence of unrelieved suspense. I believe in Mr. Vimpany.' Fanny was careful not to betray her own opinion by making any reply; her doubts of the doctor had by this time become terrifying doubts even to herself. Whenever an opportunity favoured her, she vigilantly watched him. One of his ways of finding amusement in his leisure hours was in the

use of a photographic apparatus. He took little pictures of the rooms in the cottage, which were followed by views in the garden. These having come to an end, he completed the mystification of the nurse by producing a portrait of the Dane, while he lay asleep one day after he had been improving in health for some little time past. Fanny asked leave to look at the likeness when it had been 'printed' from the negative, in the garden. He first examined it himself—and then deliberately tore it up, and let the fragments fly away in the wind. 'I am not satisfied with it,' was all the explanation he offered. One of the garden chairs happened to be near him; he sat down, and looked like a man in a state of torment under his own angry thoughts.

If the patient's health had altered for the worse, and if the tendency to relapse had proved to be noticeable after medicine had been administered, Fanny's first suspicions



He completed the mystification of the nurse by producing a portrait of the Dane while he lay asleep one day.

might have taken a very serious turn. But the change in Oxbye—sleeping in purer air and sustained by better food than he could obtain at the hospital—pointed more and more visibly to a decided gain of vital strength. His hollow cheeks were filling out; and colour was beginning to appear again on the pallor of his skin. Strange as the conduct of Lord Harry and Mr. Vimpany might be, there was no possibility, thus far, of connecting it with the position occupied by the Danish guest. Nobody who had seen his face when he was first brought to the cottage, could have looked at him again, after the lapse of a fortnight, and have failed to discover the signs which promise recovery of health.

CHAPTER XLVIII

'THE MISTRESS AND THE MAID'

IN the correspondence secretly carried on between the mistress in London and the maid at Passy, it was Fanny Mere's turn to write next. She decided on delaying her reply until she had once more given careful consideration to the first letter received from Lady Harry, announcing her arrival in England, and a strange discovery that had attended it.

Before leaving Paris, Iris had telegraphed instructions to Mrs. Vimpany to meet her at the terminus in London. Her first inquiries were for her father. The answer given, with an appearance of confusion and even of shame,

was that there was no need to feel anxiety on the subject of Mr. Henley's illness. Relieved on hearing this good news, Iris naturally expressed some surprise at her father's rapid recovery. She asked if the doctors had misunderstood his malady when they believed him to be in danger. To this question Mrs. Vimpany had replied by making an unexpected confession.

She owned that Mr. Henley's illness had been at no time of any serious importance. A paragraph in a newspaper had informed her that he was suffering from nothing worse than an attack of gout. It was a wicked act to have exaggerated this report, and to have alarmed Lady Harry on the subject of her father's health. Mrs. Vimpany had but one excuse to offer. Fanny's letter had filled her with such unendurable doubts and forebodings that she had taken the one way of inducing Lady Harry to secure her own safety by at

once leaving Passy—the way by a false alarm. Deceit, so sincerely repented, so resolutely resisted, had tried its power of temptation again, and had prevailed.

'When I thought of you at the mercy of my vile husband,' Mrs. Vimpany said, 'with *your* husband but too surely gained as an accomplice, my good resolutions failed me. Is it only in books that a true repentance never stumbles again? Or am I the one fallible mortal creature in the world? I am ashamed of myself. But, oh, Lady Harry, I was so frightened for you! Try to forgive me; I am so fond of you, and so glad to see you here in safety. Don't go back! For God's sake, don't go back!'

Iris had no intention of returning while the doctor and his patient were still at Passy; and she found in Mrs. Vimpany's compassion good reason to forgive an offence committed

through devotion to herself, and atoned for by sincere regret.

Fanny looked carefully over the next page of the letter, which described Lady Harry's first interview with Mr. Mountjoy since his illness. The expressions of happiness on renewing her relations with her old and dear friend confirmed the maid in her first impression that there was no fear of a premature return to Passy, with the wish to see Lord Harry again as the motive. She looked over the later letters next—and still the good influence of Mr. Mountjoy seemed to be in the ascendant. There was anxiety felt for Fanny's safety, and curiosity expressed to hear what discoveries she might have made; but the only allusions to my lord contained ordinary inquiries relating to the state of his health, and, on one occasion, there was a wish expressed to know whether he was still on friendly terms with Mr. Vimpany. There seemed to

be no fear of tempting her mistress to undervalue the danger of returning to the cottage, if she mentioned the cheering improvement now visible in Mr. Oxbye. And yet Fanny still hesitated to trust her first impressions, even after they had been confirmed. Her own sad experience reminded her of the fatal influence which an unscrupulous man can exercise over the woman who loves him. It was always possible that Lady Harry might not choose to confide the state of her feelings towards her husband to a person who, after all, only occupied the position of her maid. The absence, in her letters, of any expressions of affectionate regret was no proof that she was not thinking of my lord. So far as he was personally concerned, the Dane's prospects of recovery would appear to justify the action of the doctor and his accomplice. Distrusting them both as resolutely as ever, and deter-

mined to keep Lady Harry as long as possible at the safe distance of London, Fanny Mere, in writing her reply, preserved a discreet silence on the subject of Mr. Oxbye's health.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE NURSE IS SENT AWAY

'YOU have repented and changed your mind, Vimpany?' said Lord Harry.

'I repented?' the doctor repeated, with a laugh. 'You think me capable of that, do you?'

'The man is growing stronger and better every day. You are going to make him recover, after all. I was afraid'—he corrected himself—'I thought'—the word was the truer—'that you were going to poison him.'

'You thought I was going—we were going, my lord—to commit a stupid and a useless crime. And with our clever nurse present,

all the time watching with the suspicions of a cat, and noting every change in the symptoms? No—I confess his case has puzzled me because I did not anticipate this favourable change. Well—it is all for the best. Fanny sees him grow stronger every day—whatever happens she can testify to the care with which the man has been treated. So far she thought she would have us in her power, and we have her.'

'You are mighty clever, Vimpany; but sometimes you are too clever for me, and, perhaps, too clever for yourself.'

'Let me make myself clearer'—conscious of the nurse's suspicions, he leaned forward and whispered. 'Fanny must go. Now is the time. The man is recovering. The man must go: the next patient will be your lordship himself. Now do you understand?'

'Partly.'

'Enough. If I am to act it is sufficient

for you to understand step by step. Our suspicious nurse is to go. That is the next step. Leave me to act.'

Lord Harry walked away. He left the thing to the doctor. It hardly seemed to concern him. A dying man; a conspiracy; a fraud—yet the guilty knowledge of all this gave him small uneasiness. He carried with him his wife's last note: 'May I hope to find on my return the man whom I have trusted and honoured?' His conscience, callous as regards the doctor's scheme, filled him with remorse whenever—which was fifty times a day—he took this little rag of a note from his pocket-book and read it again. Yes: she would always find the man, on her return—the man whom she had trusted and honoured—the latter clause he passed over—it would be, of course, the same man: whether she would still be able to trust and honour him—that question he did not put to himself.

After all, the doctor was acting—not he, himself.

And he remembered Hugh Mountjoy. Iris would be with him—the man whose affection was only brought out in the stronger light by his respect, his devotion, and his delicacy. She would be in his society: she would understand the true meaning of this respect and delicacy: she would appreciate the depth of his devotion: she would contrast Hugh, the man she might have married, with himself, the man she did marry.

And the house was wretched without her; and he hated the sight of the doctor—desperate and reckless!

He resolved to write to Iris: he sat down and poured out his heart, but not his conscience, to her.

'As for our separation,' he said, 'I and only I, am to blame. It is my own abominable conduct that has caused it. Give me your

pardon, dearest Iris. If I have made it impossible for you to live with me, it is also impossible for me to live without you. So am I punished. The house is dull and lonely; the hours crawl, I know not how to kill the time; my life is a misery and a burden because you are not with me. Yet I have no right to complain; I ought to rejoice in thinking that you are happy in being relieved of my presence. My dear, I do not ask you to come at present'—he remembered, indeed, that her arrival at this juncture might be seriously awkward—'I cannot ask you to come back yet, but let me have a little hope—let me feel that in the sweetness of your nature you will believe in my repentance, and let me look forward to a speedy reunion in the future.'

When he had written this letter, which he would have done better to keep in his own hands for awhile, he directed it in a feigned hand to Lady Harry Norland, care of Hugh Mountjoy,

at the latter's London hotel. Mountjoy would not know Iris's correspondent, and would certainly forward the letter. He calculated—with the knowledge of her affectionate and impulsive nature—that Iris would meet him half-way, and would return whenever he should be able to call her back. He did not calculate, as will be seen, on the step which she actually took.

The letter despatched, he came back to the cottage happier—he would get his wife again. He looked in at the sick-room. The patient was sitting up chatting pleasantly; it was the best day he had known; the doctor was sitting in a chair placed beside the bed, and the nurse stood quiet, self-composed, but none the less watchful and suspicious.

'You are going on so well, my man,' Doctor Vimpany was saying, 'that we shall have you out and about again in a day or two. Not quite yet, though—not quite yet,' he

pulled out his stethoscope and made an examination with an immense show of professional interest. 'My treatment has succeeded, you see'—he made a note or two in his pocket-book—'has succeeded,' he repeated. 'They will have to acknowledge that.'

'Gracious sir, I am grateful. I have given a great deal too much trouble.'

'A medical case can never give too much trouble—that is impossible. Remember, Oxbye, it is Science which watches at your bedside. You are not Oxbye; you are a case; it is not a man, it is a piece of machinery that is out of order. Science watches: she sees you through and through. Though you are made of solid flesh and bones, and clothed, to Science you are transparent. Her business is not only to read your symptoms, but to set the machinery right again.'

The Dane, overwhelmed, could only renew his thanks.

'Can he stand, do you think, nurse?' the doctor went on. 'Let us try—not to walk about much to-day, but to get out of bed, if only to prove to himself that he is so much better; to make him understand that he is really nearly well. Come, nurse, let us give him a hand.'

In the most paternal manner possible the doctor assisted his patient, weak, after so long a confinement to his bed, to get out of bed, and supported him while he walked to the open window and looked out into the garden. 'There,' he said, 'that is enough. Not too much at first. To-morrow he will have to get up by himself. Well, Fanny, you agree at last, I suppose, that I have brought this poor man round? At last, eh?'

His look and his words showed what he meant. 'You thought that some devilry was intended.' That was what the look meant. 'You proposed to nurse this man in order to

watch for and to discover this devilry. Very well, what have you got to say?'

All that Fanny had to say was, submissively, that the man was clearly much better; and, she added, he had been steadily improving ever since he came to the cottage.

That is what she said; but she said it without the light of confidence in her eyes—she was still doubtful and suspicious. Whatever power the doctor had of seeing the condition of lungs and hidden machinery, he certainly had the power of reading this woman's thoughts. He saw, as clearly as if upon a printed page, the bewilderment of her mind. She knew that something was intended—something not for her to know. That the man had been brought to the cottage to be made the subject of a scientific experiment she did not believe. She had looked to see him die, but he did not die. He was mending fast; in a little while he would be as well as

ever he had been in his life. What had the doctor done it for? Was it really possible that nothing was ever intended beyond a scientific experiment, which had succeeded? In the case of any other man, the woman's doubts would have been entirely removed; in the case of Dr. Vimpany these doubts remained. There are some men of whom nothing good can be believed, whether of motive or of action; for if their acts seem good, their motive must be bad. Many women know, or fancy they know, such a man—one who seems to them wholly and hopelessly bad. Besides, what was the meaning of the secret conversation and the widespread colloquies of the doctor and my lord? And why, at first, was the doctor so careless about his patient?

'The time has come at last,' said the doctor that evening, when the two men were alone, 'for this woman to go. The man is

getting well rapidly, he no longer wants a nurse; there is no reason for keeping her. If she has suspicions there is no longer the least foundation for them; she has assisted at the healing of a man desperately sick by a skilful physician. What more? Nothing—positively nothing.'

'Can she tell my wife so much and no more?' asked Lord Harry. 'Will there be no more?'

'She can tell her ladyship no more, because she will have no more to tell,' the doctor replied quietly. 'She would like to learn more; she is horribly disappointed that there is no more to tell; but she shall hear no more. She hates me; but she hates your lordship more.'

'Why?'

'Because her mistress loves you still. Such a woman as this would like to absorb the whole affection of her mistress in herself.

You laugh. She is a servant, and a common person. How can such a person conceive an affection so strong as to become a passion for one so superior? But it is true. It is perfectly well known, and there have been many recorded instances of such a woman, say a servant, greatly inferior in station, conceiving a desperate affection for her mistress, accompanied by the fiercest jealousy. Fanny Mere is jealous—and of you. She hates you; she wants your wife to hate you. She would like nothing better than to go back to her mistress with the proofs in her hand of such acts on your part—such acts, I say,' he chose his next words carefully, 'as would keep her from you for ever.'

'She's a devil, I dare say,' said Lord Harry, carelessly. 'What do I care? What does it matter to me whether a lady's maid, more or less, hates me or loves me?'

'There spoke the aristocrat. My lord,

remember that a lady's maid is a woman. You have been brought up to believe, perhaps, that people in service are not men and women. That is a mistake—a great mistake. Fanny Mere is a woman—that is to say, an inferior form of man; and there is no man in the world so low or so base as not to be able to do mischief. The power of mischief is given to every one of us. It is the true, the only Equality of Man—we can all destroy. What? a shot in the dark; the striking of a lucifer-match; the false accusation; the false witness; the defamation of character—upon my word, it is far more dangerous to be hated by a woman than by a man. And this excellent and faithful Fanny, devoted to her mistress, hates you, my lord, even more'—he paused and laughed—'even more than the charming Mrs. Vimpany hates her husband. Never mind. To-morrow we see the last of Fanny Mere. She goes; she leaves

her patient rapidly recovering. That is the fact that she carries away—not the fact she hoped and expected to carry away. She goes to-morrow, and she will never come back again.'

The next morning the doctor paid a visit to his patient rather earlier than usual. He found the man going on admirably: fresh in colour, lively and cheerful, chatting pleasantly with his nurse.

'So,' said Dr. Vimpany, after the usual examination and questions, 'this is better than I expected. You are now able to get up. You can do so by-and-by, after breakfast; you can dress yourself, you want no more help. Nurse,' he turned to Fanny, 'I think that we have done with you. I am satisfied with the careful watch you have kept over my patient. If ever you think of becoming a nurse by profession rely on my recommendation. The experiment,' he

added, thoughtfully, 'has fully succeeded. I cannot deny that it has been owing partly to the intelligence and patience with which you have carried out my instructions. But I think that your services may now be relinquished.'

'When am I to go, sir?' she asked, impassively.

'In any other case I should have said, "Stay a little longer, if you please. Use your own convenience." In your case I must say, "Go to your mistress." Her ladyship was reluctant to leave you behind. She will be glad to have you back again. How long will you take to get ready?'

'I could be ready in ten minutes if it were necessary.'

'That is not necessary. You can take the night mail *viâ* Dieppe and Newhaven. It leaves Paris at 9.50. Give yourself an hour to get from station to station. Any

time, therefore, this evening before seven o'clock will do perfectly well. You will ask his lordship for any letters or messages he may have.'

'Yes, sir,' Fanny replied. 'With your permission, sir, I will go at once, so as to get a whole day in Paris.'

'As you please, as you please,' said the doctor, wondering why she wanted a day in Paris; but it could have nothing to do with his sick man. He left the room, promising to see the Dane again in an hour or two, and took up a position at the garden-gate through which the nurse must pass. In about half an hour she walked down the path carrying her box. The doctor opened the gate for her.

'Good-bye, Fanny,' he said. 'Again, many thanks for your care and your watchfulness—especially the latter. I am very glad,' he said, with what he meant for the sweetest smile, but it looked like a grin, 'that

it has been rewarded in such a way as you hardly perhaps expected.'

'Thank you, sir,' said the girl. 'The man is nearly well now, and can do without me very well indeed.'

'The box is too heavy for you, Fanny. Nay, I insist upon it: I shall carry it to the station for you.'

It was not far to the station, and the box was not too heavy, but Fanny yielded it. 'He wants to see me safe out of the station,' she thought.

'I will see her safe out of the place,' he thought.

Ten minutes later the doors of the *salle d'attente* were thrown open, the train rolled in, and Fanny was carried away.

The doctor returned thoughtfully to the house. The time was come for the execution of his project. Everybody was out of the way.

'She is gone,' he said, when Lord Harry returned for breakfast at eleven. 'I saw her safely out of the station.'

'Gone!' his confederate echoed; 'and I am alone in the house with you and—and——'

'The sick man—henceforth, yourself, my lord, yourself.'

CHAPTER L

IN THE ALCOVE

THE doctor was wrong. Fanny Mere did return, though he did not discover the fact.

She went away in a state of mind which is dangerous when it possesses a woman of determination. The feminine mind loves to understand motives and intentions; it hates to be puzzled. Fanny

was puzzled. Fanny could not understand what had been intended and what was now meant. For, first, a man, apparently dying, had been brought into the house—why? Then the man began slowly to recover, and the doctor, whose attentions had always been of the most slender character, grew more morose every day. Then he suddenly, on the very day when he sent her away, became cheerful, congratulated the patient on his prospect of recovery, and assisted in getting him out of bed for a change. The cook having been sent away, there was now no one in the house but the Dane, the doctor, and Lord Harry.

Man hunts wild creatures; woman hunts man. Fanny was impelled by the hunting instinct. She was sent out of the house to prevent her hunting; she began to consider next, how, without discovery, she could return and carry on the hunt.

Everything conspired to drive her back: the mystery of the thing; the desire to baffle, or at least to discover, a dark design; the wish to be of service to her mistress; and the hope of finding out something which would keep Iris from going back to her husband. Fanny was unable to comprehend the depth of her mistress's affection for Lord Harry; but that she was foolishly, weakly in love with him, and that she would certainly return to him unless plain proofs of real villany were prepared—so much Fanny understood very well. When the omnibus set her down, she found a quiet hotel near the terminus for Dieppe. She spent the day walking about—to see the shops and streets, she would have explained; to consider the situation, she should have explained. She bought a new dress, a new hat, and a thick veil, so as to be disguised at a distance. As for escaping the doctor's acuteness by any

disguise should he meet her face to face, that was impossible. But her mind was made up —she would run any risk, meet any danger, in order to discover the meaning of all this.

Next morning she returned by an omnibus service which would allow her to reach the cottage at about a quarter-past eleven. She chose this time for two reasons: first, because breakfast was sent in from the restaurant at eleven, and the two gentlemen would certainly be in the *salle à manger* over that meal; and, next, because the doctor always visited his patient after breakfast. She could, therefore, hope to get in unseen, which was the first thing.

The spare bedroom—that assigned to the patient—was on the ground-floor next to the dining-room; it communicated with the garden by French windows, and by a small flight of steps.

Fanny walked cautiously along the road

past the garden-gate; a rapid glance assured her that no one was there; she hastily opened the gate and slipped in. She knew that the windows of the sick-room were closed on the inner side, and the blinds were still down. The patient, therefore, had not yet been disturbed or visited. The windows of the dining-room were on the other side of the house. The woman therefore slipped round to the back, where she found, as she expected, the door wide open. In the hall she heard the voices of the doctor and Lord Harry and the clicking of knives and forks. They were at breakfast.

One thing more—What should she say to Oxbye? What excuse should she make for coming back? How should she persuade him to keep silence about her presence? His passion suggested a plan and a reason. She had come back, she would tell him, for love of him, to watch over him, unseen by the

doctor, to go away with him when he was strong enough to travel. He was a simple and a candid soul, and he would fall into such a little innocent conspiracy. Meantime, it would be quite easy for her to remain in the house perfectly undisturbed and unknown to either of the gentlemen.

She opened the door and looked in.

So far, no reason would be wanted. The patient was sleeping peacefully. But not in the bed. He was lying, partly dressed and covered with a blanket, on the sofa. With the restlessness of convalesence he had changed his couch in the morning after a wakeful night, and was now sleeping far into the morning.

The bed, as is common in French houses, stood in an alcove. A heavy curtain hung over a rod, also in the French manner. Part of this curtain lay over the head of the bed.

The woman perceived the possibility of

using the curtain as a means of concealment. There was a space of a foot between the bed and the wall. She placed herself therefore behind the bed, in this space, at the head, where the curtain entirely concealed her. Nothing was more unlikely than that the doctor should look behind the bed in that corner. Then with her scissors she pierced a hole in the curtain large enough for her to see perfectly without the least danger of being seen, and she waited to see what would happen.

She waited for half an hour, during which the sleeping man slept on without movement, and the voices of the two men in the *salle à manger* rose and fell in conversation. Presently there was silence, broken only by an occasional remark. 'They have lit their cigars,' Fanny murmured; 'they will take their coffee, and in a few minutes they will be here.'

When they came in a few minutes later, they had their cigars, and Lord Harry's face was slightly flushed, perhaps with the wine he had taken at breakfast—perhaps with the glass of brandy after his coffee.

The doctor threw himself into a chair and crossed his legs, looking thoughtfully at his patient. Lord Harry stood over him.

'Every day,' he said, 'the man gets better.'

'He has got better every day, so far,' said the doctor.

'Every day his face gets fatter, and he grows less like me.'

'It is true,' said the doctor.

'Then—what the devil are we to do?'

'Wait a little longer,' said the doctor.

The woman in her hiding-place hardly dared to breathe.

'What?' asked Lord Harry. 'You mean that the man, after all——'

'Wait a little longer,' the doctor repeated quietly.

'Tell me'—Lord Harry bent over the sick man eagerly—'you think——'

'Look here,' the doctor said. 'Which of us two has had a medical education—you, or I?'

'You, of course.'

'Yes; I, of course. Then I tell you, as a medical man, that appearances are sometimes deceptive. This man, for instance—he looks better; he thinks he is recovering; he feels stronger. You observe that he is fatter in the face. His nurse, Fanny Mere, went away with the knowledge that he was much better, and the conviction that he was about to leave the house as much recovered as such a patient with such a disorder can expect.'

'Well?'

'Well, my lord, allow me to confide in you. Medical men mostly keep their knowledge in such matters to themselves. We

know and recognise symptoms which to you are invisible. By these symptoms—by these symptoms,' he repeated slowly and looking hard at the other man, 'I know that this man —no longer Oxbye, my patient, but—another —is in a highly dangerous condition. I have noted the symptoms in my book'—he tapped his pocket—'for future use.'

'And when—when——' Lord Harry was frightfully pale. His lips moved, but he could not finish the sentence. The Thing he had agreed to was terribly near, and it looked uglier than he had expected.

'Oh! when?' the doctor replied carelessly. 'Perhaps to-day—perhaps in a week. Here, you see, Science is sometimes baffled. I cannot say.'

Lord Harry breathed deeply. 'If the man is in so serious a condition,' he said, 'is it safe or prudent for us to be alone in the house without a servant and without a nurse?'

'I was not born yesterday, my lord, I assure you,' said the doctor in his jocular way. 'They have found me a nurse. She will come to-day. My patient's life is, humanly speaking'—Lord Harry shuddered—'perfectly safe until her arrival.'

'Well—but she is a stranger. She must know whom she is nursing.'

'Certainly. She will be told—I have already told her—that she is going to nurse Lord Harry Norland, a young Irish gentleman. She is a stranger. That is the most valuable quality she possesses. She is a complete stranger. As for you, what are you? Anything you please. An English gentleman staying with me under the melancholy circumstances of his lordship's illness. What more natural? The English doctor is staying with his patient, and the English friend is staying with the doctor. When the insurance officer makes inquiries, as he is very likely to do,

the nurse will be invaluable for the evidence she will give.'

He rose, pulled up the blinds noiselessly, and opened the windows. Neither the fresh air nor the light awoke the sleeping man.

Vimpany looked at his watch. 'Time for the medicine,' he said. 'Wake him up while I get it ready.'

'Would you not—at least—suffer him to have his sleep out?' asked Lord Harry, again turning pale.

'Wake him up. Shake him by the shoulder. Do as I tell you,' said the doctor, roughly. 'He will go to sleep again. It is one of the finer qualities of my medicine that it sends people to sleep. It is a most soothing medicine. It causes a deep—a profound sleep. Wake him up, I say.' He went to the cupboard in which the medicines were kept. Lord Harry with some difficulty roused the

sick man, who awoke dull and heavy, asking why he was disturbed.

'Time for your medicine, my good fellow,' said the doctor. 'Take it, and you shall not be disturbed again—I promise you that.'

The door of the cupboard prevented the spy from seeing what the doctor was doing; but he took longer than usual in filling the glass. Lord Harry seemed to observe this, for he left the Dane and looked over the doctor's shoulder. 'What are you doing?' he asked in a whisper.

'Better not inquire, my lord,' said the doctor. 'What do you know about the mysteries of medicine?'

'Why must I not inquire?'

Vimpany turned, closing the cupboard behind him. In his hand was a glass full of the stuff he was about to administer.

'If you look in the glass,' he said, 'you will understand why.'

Lord Harry obeyed. He saw a face ghastly in pallor: he shrank back and fell into a chair, saying no more.

'Now, my good friend,' said the doctor, 'drink this and you'll be better—ever so much better—ever so much better. Why—that is brave——' He looked at him strangely. 'How do you like the medicine?'

Oxbye shook his head as a man who has taken something nauseous. 'I don't like it at all,' he said. 'It doesn't taste like the other physic.'

'No; I have been changing it—improving it.'

The Dane shook his head again. 'There's a pain in my throat,' he said; 'it stings—it burns!'

'Patience—patience. It will pass away directly, and you will lie down again and fall asleep comfortably.'

Oxbye sank back upon the sofa. His

eyes closed. Then he opened them again, looking about him strangely, as one who is suffering some new experience. Again he shook his head, again he closed his eyes, and he opened them no more. He was asleep.

The doctor stood at his head watching gravely. Lord Harry, in his chair, leaned forward, also watching, but with white face and trembling hands.

As they watched, the man's head rolled a little to the side, turning his face more towards the room. Then a curious and terrifying thing happened. His mouth began slowly to fall open.

'Is he—is he—is he fainting?' Lord Harry whispered.

'No; he is asleep. Did you never see a man sleep with his mouth wide open?'

They were silent for a space.

The doctor broke the silence.

'There's a good light this morning,' he

said carelessly. 'I think I will try a photograph. Stop! Let me tie up his mouth with a handkerchief—so.' The patient was not disturbed by the operation, though the doctor tied up the handkerchief with vigour enough to awaken a sound sleeper. 'Now—we'll see if he looks like a post-mortem portrait.'

He went into the next room, and returned with his camera. In a few minutes he had taken the picture, and was holding the glass negative against the dark sleeve of his coat, so as to make it visible. 'We shall see how it looks,' he said, 'when it is printed. At present I don't think it is good enough as an imitation of you to be sent to the insurance offices. Nobody, I am afraid, who knew you, would ever take this for a post-mortem portrait of Lord Harry. Well, we shall see. Perhaps by-and-by—to-morrow—we may be able to take a better photograph. Eh?' Lord Harry followed his movements, watching him closely,

but said nothing. His face remained pale and his fingers still trembled. There was now no doubt at all in his mind, not only as to Vimpany's intentions, but as to the crime itself. He dared not speak or move.

A ring at the door pealed through the house. Lord Harry started in his chair with a cry of terror.

'That,' said the doctor, quietly, 'is the nurse—the new nurse—the stranger.' He took off the handkerchief from Oxbye's face, looked about the room as if careful that everything should be in its right place, and went out to admit the woman. Lord Harry sprang to his feet and passed his hand over the sick man's face.

'Is it done?' he whispered. 'Can the man be poisoned? Is he already dead?—already? Before my eyes?'

He laid his finger on the sick man's pulse. But the doctor's step and voice stopped him.

Then the nurse came in, following Vimpany. She was an elderly, quiet-looking Frenchwoman.

Lord Harry remained standing at the side of the sofa, hoping to see the man revive.

'Now,' said Vimpany, cheerfully, 'here is your patient, nurse. He is asleep now. Let him have his sleep out—he has taken his medicine and will want nothing more yet awhile. If you want anything let me know. We shall be in the next room or in the garden—somewhere about the house. Come, my friend.' He drew away Lord Harry gently by the arm, and they left the room.

Behind the curtain Fanny Mere began to wonder how she was to get off unseen.

The nurse, left alone, looked at her patient, who lay with his head turned partly round, his eyes closed, his mouth open. 'A strange sleep,' she murmured; 'but the doctor knows, I suppose. He is to have his sleep out.'

'A strange sleep, indeed!' thought the watcher. She was tempted at this moment to disclose herself and to reveal what she had seen; but the thought of Lord Harry's complicity stopped her. With what face could she return to her mistress and tell her that she herself was the means of her husband being charged with murder? She stayed herself, therefore, and waited.

Chance helped her, at last, to escape.

The nurse took off her bonnet and shawl and began to look about the room. She stepped to the bed and examined the sheets and pillow-case as a good French housewife should. Would she throw back the curtain? If so—what would happen next? Then it would become necessary to take the new nurse into confidence, otherwise—— Fanny did not put the remainder of this sentence into words. It remained a terror: it meant that if Vimpany found out where she had

been and what she had seen and heard, there would be two, instead of one, cast into a deep slumber.

The nurse turned from the bed, however, attracted by the half-open door of the cupboard. Here were the medicine bottles. She took them out one by one, looked at them with professional curiosity, pulled out the corks, smelt the contents, replaced the bottles. Then she went to the window, which stood open, she stepped out upon the stone steps which led into the garden, looking about her, to breathe the soft air of noon among the flowers.

She came back, and it again seemed as if she would examine the bed, but her attention was attracted by a small book-case. She began to pull down the books one after the other and to turn them over, as a half-educated person does, in the hope of finding something amusing. She found a book with

pictures. Then she sat down in the armchair beside the sofa and began to turn over the leaves slowly. How long was this going to last?

It lasted about half an hour. The nurse laid down the volume with a yawn, stretched herself, yawned again, crossed her hands, and closed her eyes. She was going to sleep. If she would only fall so fast asleep that the woman behind the curtain could creep away!

But sometimes at the sleepiest moment sleep is driven away by an accident. The accident in this case was that the nurse before finally dropping off remembered that she was nursing a sick man, and sat up to look at him before she allowed herself to drop off.

Stung with sudden inspiration she sprang to her feet and bent over the man. 'Does he breathe?' she asked. She bent lower. 'His pulse! does it beat?' She caught his wrist.

'Doctor!' she shrieked, running into the garden. 'Doctor! Come—come quick! He is dead!'

Fanny Mere stepped from her hiding-place and ran out of the back door, and by the garden gate into the road.

She had escaped. She had seen the crime committed. She knew now at least what was intended and why she was sent away. The motive for the crime she could not guess.

CHAPTER LI

WHAT NEXT?

WHAT should she do with the terrible secret?

She ought to inform the police. But there were two objections. First, the nurse may have been mistaken in supposing her patient to be dead. She herself had no choice but to escape as she did. Next, the dreadful thought occurred to her that she herself until the previous day had been the man's nurse—his only nurse, day and night. What was to prevent the doctor from fixing the guilt of poisoning upon herself? Nay; it would be his most obvious line of action. The man was left alone all the morning; the

day before he had shown every sign of returning strength ; she would have to confess that she was in hiding. How long had she been there? Why was she in hiding? Was it not after she had poisoned the man and when she heard the doctor's footstep? Naturally ignorant of poisons and their symptoms, it seemed to her as if these facts so put together would be conclusive against her. Therefore, she determined to keep quiet in Paris that day and to cross over by the night boat from Dieppe in the evening. She would at first disclose everything to Mrs. Vimpany and to Mountjoy. As to what she would tell her mistress she would be guided by the advice of the others.

She got to London in safety and drove straight to Mr. Mountjoy's hotel, proposing first to communicate the whole business to him. But she found in his sitting-room Mrs. Vimpany herself.

'We must not awake him,' she said, 'whatever news you bring. His perfect recovery depends entirely on rest and quiet. There'—she pointed to the chimneypiece—'is a letter in my lady's handwriting. I am afraid I know only too well what it tells him.'

'What does it tell?'

'This very morning,' Mrs. Vimpany went on, 'I called at her lodging. She has gone away.'

'Gone away? My lady gone away? Where is she gone?'

'Where do you think she is most likely to have gone?'

'Not?—oh!—not to her husband? Not to him?—oh! this is more terrible—far more terrible—than you can imagine.'

'You will tell me why it is now so much more terrible. Meantime, I find that the cabman was told to drive to Victoria. That is all I know. I have no doubt, however, but

that she has gone back to her husband. She has been in a disturbed, despondent condition ever since she arrived in London. Mr. Mountjoy has been as kind as usual; but he has not been able to chase away her sadness. Whether she was fretting after her husband, or whether—but this I hardly think—she was comparing the man she had lost with the man she had taken—but I do not know. All I do know is that she has been uneasy ever since she came from France, and what I believe is that she has been reproaching herself with leaving her husband without good cause.'

'Good cause!' echoed Fanny. 'Oh! good gracious! If she only knew, there's cause enough to leave a hundred husbands.'

'Nothing seemed to rouse her,' Mrs. Vimpany continued, without regarding the interruption. 'I went with her to the farm to see her former maid, Rhoda. The girl's health is re-established; she is engaged to marry the

farmer's brother. Lady Harry was kind, and said the most pleasant things; she even pulled off one of her prettiest rings and gave it to the girl. But I could see that it was an effort for her to appear interested—her thoughts were with her husband all the time. I was sure it would end in this way, and I am not in the least surprised. But what will Mr. Mountjoy say when he opens the letter?'

'Back to her husband!' Fanny repeated. 'Oh! what shall we do?'

'Tell me what you mean. What has happened?'

'I must tell you. I thought I would tell Mr. Mountjoy first; but I must tell you, although——' She stopped.

'Although it concerns my husband. Never mind that consideration—go on.' Fanny told the story from the beginning.

When she had finished, Mrs. Vimpany looked towards the bedroom door. 'Thank

God!' she said, 'that you told this story to me instead of to Mr. Mountjoy. At all events, it gives me time to warn you not to tell him what you have told me. We can do nothing. Meantime, there is one thing you must do—go away. Do not let Mr. Mountjoy find you here. He must not learn your story. If he hears what has happened and reads her letter, nothing will keep him from following her to Passy. He will see that there is every prospect of her being entangled in this vile conspiracy, and he will run any risk in the useless attempt to save her. He is too weak to bear the journey—far too weak for the violent emotions that will follow; and, oh! how much too weak to cope with my husband—as strong and as crafty as he is unprincipled!'

'Then, what, in Heaven's name, are we to do?'

'Anything—anything—rather than suffer

Mr. Mountjoy, in his weak state, to interfere between man and wife.'

'Yes — yes — but such a man! Mrs. Vimpany, he was present when the Dane was poisoned. He *knew* that the man was poisoned. He sat in the chair, his face white, and he said nothing. Oh! It was as much as I could do not to rush out and dash the glass from his hands. Lord Harry said nothing.'

'My dear, do you not understand what you have got to do?'

Fanny made no reply.

'Consider—my husband—Lord Harry—neither of them knows that you were present. You can return with the greatest safety; and then, whatever happens, you will be at hand to protect my lady. Consider, again, as her maid, you can be with her always—in her own room; at night; everywhere and at all times; while Mr. Mountjoy could only be

with her now and then, and at the price of not quarrelling with her husband.'

'Yes,' said Fanny.

'And you are strong, and Mr. Mountjoy is weak and ill.'

'You think that I should go back to Passy?'

'At once, without the delay of an hour. Lady Harry started last night. Do you start this evening. She will thus have you with her twenty-four hours after her arrival.'

Fanny rose.

'I will go,' she said. 'It terrifies me even to think of going back to that awful cottage with that dreadful man. Yet I will go. Mrs. Vimpany, I know that it will be of no use. Whatever is going to happen now will happen without any power of mine to advance or to prevent. I am certain that my journey will prove useless. But I will go. Yes, I will go this evening.'

Then, with a final promise to write as soon as possible—as soon as there should be anything to communicate—Fanny went away.

Mrs. Vimpany, alone, listened. From the bedroom came no sound at all. Mr. Mountjoy slept still. When he should be strong enough it would be time to let him know what had been done. But she sat thinking —thinking—even when one has the worst husband in the world, and very well knows his character, it is disagreeable to hear such a story as Fanny had told that wife this morning.

CHAPTER LII

THE DEAD MAN'S PHOTOGRAPH

'HE is quite dead,' said the doctor, with one finger on the man's pulse and another lifting his eyelid. 'He is dead. I did not look for so speedy an end. It is not half an hour since I left him breathing peacefully. Did he show signs of consciousness?'

'No, sir; I found him dead.'

'This morning he was cheerful. It is not unusual in these complaints. I have observed it in many cases of my own experience. On the last morning of life, at the very moment when Death is standing on the threshold with uplifted dart, the patient is cheerful and even

joyous: he is more hopeful than he has felt for many months: he thinks—nay, he is sure—that he is recovering: he says he shall be up and about before long: he has not felt so strong since the beginning of his illness. Then Death strikes him, and he falls.' He made this remark in a most impressive manner.

'Nothing remains,' he said, 'but to certify the cause of death and to satisfy the proper forms and authorities. I charge myself with this duty. The unfortunate young man belonged to a highly distinguished family. I will communicate with his friends and forward his papers. One last office I can do for him. For the sake of his family, nurse, I will take a last photograph of him as he lies upon his death-bed.' Lord Harry stood in the doorway, listening with an aching and a fearful heart. He dared not enter the chamber. It was the Chamber of Death. What was his

own part in calling the Destroying Angel who is at the beck and summons of every man—even the meanest? Call him—and he comes. Order him to strike—and he obeys. But under penalties.

The doctor's prophecy, then, had come true. But in what way and by what agency? The man was dead. What was his own share in the man's death? He knew when the Dane was brought into the house that he was brought there to die. As the man did not die, but began to recover fast, he had seen in the doctor's face that the man would have to die. He had heard the doctor prophesy out of his medical knowledge that the man would surely die; and then, after the nurse had been sent away because her patient required her services no longer, he had seen the doctor give the medicine which burned the patient's throat. What was that medicine? Not only had it burned his throat, but it caused him to

fall into a deep sleep, in which his heart ceased to beat and his blood ceased to flow.

He turned away and walked out of the cottage. For an hour he walked along the road. Then he stopped and walked back. Ropes drew him; he could no longer keep away. He felt as if something must have happened. Possibly he would find the doctor arrested and the police waiting for himself, to be charged as an accomplice or a principal.

He found no such thing. The doctor was in the salon, with letters and official forms before him. He looked up cheerfully.

'My English friend,' he said, 'the unexpected end of this young Irish gentleman is a very melancholy affair. I have ascertained the name of the family solicitors and have written to them. I have also written to his brother as the head of the house. I find also, by examination of his papers, that his life is insured—the amount is not stated, but I have

communicated the fact of the death. The authorities—they are, very properly, careful in such matters—have received the necessary notices and forms: to-morrow, all legal forms having been gone through, we bury the deceased.'

'So soon?'

'So soon? In these cases of advanced pulmonary disease the sooner the better. The French custom of speedy interment may be defended as more wholesome than our own. On the other hand, I admit that it has its weak points. Cremation is, perhaps, the best and only method of removing the dead which is open to no objections except one. I mean, of course, the chance that the deceased may have met with his death by means of poison. But such cases are rare, and, in most instances, would be detected by the medical man in attendance before or at the time of death. I think we need not—— My dear friend, you

look ill. Are you upset by such a simple thing as the death of a sick man? Let me prescribe for you. A glass of brandy neat. So,' he went into the *salle à manger* and returned with his medicine. 'Take that. Now let us talk.' The doctor continued his conversation in a cheerfully scientific strain, never alluding to the conspiracy or to the consequences which might follow. He told hospital stories bearing on deaths sudden and unexpected; some of them he treated in a jocular vein. The dead man in the next room was a Case: he knew of many similar and equally interesting Cases. When one has arrived at looking upon a dead man as a Case, there is little fear of the ordinary human weakness which makes us tremble in the awful presence of death.

Presently steps were heard outside. The doctor rose and left the room--but returned in a few minutes.

'The croquemorts have come,' he said. 'They are with the nurse engaged upon their business. It seems revolting to the outside world. To them it is nothing but the daily routine of work. By-the-way, I took a photograph of his lordship in the presence of the nurse. Unfortunately—but look at it——'

'It is the face of the dead man'—Lord Harry turned away. 'I don't want to see it. I cannot bear to see it. You forget—I was actually present when——'

'Not when he died. Come, don't be a fool. What I was going to say was this: The face is no longer in the least like you. Nobody who ever saw you once even would believe that this is your face. The creature—he has given us an unconscionable quantity of trouble—was a little like you when he first came. I was wrong in supposing that this likeness was permanent. Now he is dead, he is not in the least like you. I ought to have

remembered that the resemblance would fade away and disappear in death. Come and look at him.'

'No, no.'

'Weakness! Death restores to every man his individuality. No two men are like in death, though they may be like in life. Well. It comes to this: We are going to bury Lord Harry Norland to-morrow, and we must have a photograph of him as he lay on his death-bed.'

'Well?'

'Well, my friend, go upstairs to your own room, and I will follow with the camera.'

In a quarter of an hour he was holding the glass against his sleeve.

'Admirable!' he said. 'The cheek a little sunken—that was the effect of the chalk and the adjustment of the shadows—the eyes closed, the face white, the hands composed.

It is admirable! Who says that we cannot make the sun tell lies?'

He spent an hour or two in developing and printing a fresh copy from the negative. This he mounted and gave to Lord Harry.

'There,' he said, 'we shall get a better print to-morrow. This is the first copy.'

He had mounted it on a frame of card, and had written under it the name once borne by the dead man, with the date of his death. The picture seemed indeed that of a dead man. Lord Harry shuddered.

'There,' he said, 'everything else has been of no use to us—the presence of the sick man—the suspicions of the nurse—his death—even his death—has been of no use to us! We might have been spared the memory—the awful memory—of this death!'

'You forget, my English friend, that a dead body was necessary for us. We had to bury somebody. Why not the man Oxbye?'

CHAPTER LIII

THE WIFE'S RETURN

OF course Mrs. Vimpany was quite right. Iris had gone back to her husband. She arrived, in fact, at the cottage in the evening just before dark —in the falling day, when some people are more than commonly sensitive to sights and sounds, and when the eyes are more apt than at other times to be deceived by strange appearances. Iris walked into the garden, finding no one there. She opened the door with her own key and let herself in. The house struck her as strangely empty and silent. She opened the dining-room door; no one was there. Like all French dining-rooms,

it was used for no other purpose than for eating, and furnished with little more than the barest necessaries. She closed the door and opened that of the salon: that also was empty. She called her husband: there was no answer. She called the name of the cook: there was no answer. It was fortunate that she did not open the door of the spare room, for there lay the body of the dead man. She went upstairs to her husband's room. That too was empty. But there was something lying on the table—a photograph. She took it up. Her face became white suddenly and swiftly. She shrieked aloud, then dropped the picture and fell fainting to the ground. For the photograph was nothing less than that of her husband, dead, in his white grave-clothes, his hands composed, his eyes closed his cheek waxen.

The cry fell upon the ears of Lord Harry, who was in the garden below. He rushed

into the house and lifted his wife upon the bed. The photograph showed him plainly what had happened.

he came to her senses again, but seeing her husband alive before her, and remembering what she had seen, she shrieked again, and fell into another swoon.

'What is to be done now?' asked the husband. 'What shall I tell her? How shall I make her understand? What can I do for her?'

As for help, there was none: the nurse was gone on some errand; the doctor was arranging for the funeral of Oxbye under the name of Lord Harry Norland; the cottage was empty.

Such a fainting fit does not last for ever. Iris came round, and sat up, looking wildly around.

'What is it?' she cried. 'What does it mean?'

'It means, my love, that you have returned to your husband.' He laid an arm round her, and kissed her again and again.

'You are my Harry!—living!—my own Harry?'

'Your own Harry, my darling. What else should I be?'

'Tell me then, what does it mean—that picture—that horrid photograph?'

'That means nothing—nothing—a freak—a joke of the doctor's. What could it mean?' He took it up. 'Why, my dear, I am living—living and well. What should this mean but a joke?'

He laid it on the table again, face downwards. But her eyes showed that she was not satisfied. Men do not make jokes on Death: it is a sorry jest indeed to dress up a man in grave-clothes, and make a photograph of him as of one dead.

'But you—you, my Iris; you are here—

tell me how and why—and when, and everything? Never mind that stupid picture: tell me.'

'I got your letter, Harry,' she replied.

'My letter?' he repeated. 'Oh! my dear, you got my letter, and you saw that your husband loved you still.'

'I could not keep away from you, Harry, whatever had happened. I stayed as long as I could. I thought about you day and night. And at last I—I—I came back. Are you angry with me, Harry?'

'Angry? Good God! my dearest, angry?' He kissed her passionately—not the less passionately that she had returned at a time so terrible. What was he to say to her? How was he to tell her? While he showered kisses on her he was asking himself these questions. When she found out—when he should confess to her the whole truth—she would leave him again. Yet he did not understand the nature

of the woman who loves. He held her in his arms; his kisses pleaded for him; they mastered her—she was ready to believe, to accept, to surrender even her truth and honesty; and she was ready, though she knew it not, to become the accomplice of a crime. Rather than leave her husband again, she would do everything.

Yet, Lord Harry felt there was one reservation: he might confess everything, except the murder of the Dane. No word of confession had passed the doctor's lips, yet he knew too well that the man had been murdered; and, so far as the man had been chosen for his resemblance to himself, that was perfectly useless, because the resemblance, though striking at the first, had been gradually disappearing as the man Oxbye grew better; and was now, as we have seen, wholly lost after death.

'I have a great deal—a great deal—to tell

you, dear,' said the husband, holding both her hands tenderly. 'You will have to be very patient with me. You must make up your mind to be shocked at first, though I shall be able to convince you that there was really nothing else to be done—nothing else at all.'

'Oh! go on, Harry. Tell me all. Hide nothing.'

'I will tell you all,' he replied.

'First, where is that poor man whom the doctor brought here and Fanny nursed? And where is Fanny?'

'The poor man,' he replied carelessly, 'made so rapid a recovery that he has got on his legs and gone away—I believe, to report himself to the hospital whence he came. It is a great triumph for the doctor, whose new treatment is now proved to be successful. He will make a grand flourish of trumpets about it. I dare say, if all he claims for it is

true, he has taken a great step in the treatment of lung diseases.'

Iris had no disease of the lungs, and consequently cared very little for the scientific aspect of the question.

'Where is my maid, then?'

'Fanny? She went away—let me see: to-day is Friday—on Wednesday morning. It was no use keeping her here. The man was well, and she was anxious to get back to you. So she started on Wednesday morning, proposing to take the night boat from Dieppe. She must have stopped somewhere on the way.'

'I suppose she will go to see Mrs. Vimpany. I will send her a line there.'

'Certainly. That will be sure to find her.'

'Well, Harry, is there anything else to tell me?'

'A great deal,' he repeated. 'That photograph, Iris, which frightened you so

much, has been very carefully taken by Vimpany for a certain reason.'

'What reason?'

'There are occasions,' he replied, 'when the very best thing that can happen to a man is the belief that he is dead. Such a juncture of affairs has happened to myself—and to you—at this moment. It is convenient—even necessary—for me that the world should believe me dead. In point of fact, I must be dead henceforth. Not for anything that I have done, or that I am afraid of—don't think that. No; it is for the simple reason that I have no longer any money or any resources whatever. That is why I must be dead. Had you not returned in this unexpected manner, my dear, you would have heard of my death from the doctor, and he would have left it to chance to find a convenient opportunity of letting you know the truth. I am, however, deeply grieved that I

was so careless as to leave that photograph upon the table.'

'I do not understand,' she said. 'You pretend to be dead?'

'Yes. I *must* have money. I have some left—a very little. I *must* have money; and, in order to get it, I must be dead.'

'How will that help?'

'Why, my dear, I am insured, and my insurances will be paid after my death; but not before.'

'Oh! must you get money—even by a ——' She hesitated.

'Call it a conspiracy, my dear, if you please. As there is no other way whatever left, I must get money that way.'

'Oh, this is dreadful! A conspiracy, Harry? a—a—fraud?'

'If you please. That is the name which lawyers give to it.'

'But oh, Harry!—it is a crime. It is a

thing for which men are tried and found guilty and sentenced.'

'Certainly: if they are found out. Meantime, it is only the poor, ignorant, clumsy fool who gets found out. In the City these things are done every day. Quite as a matter of course,' he added carelessly. 'It is not usual for men to take their wives into confidence, but in this case I must take you into confidence: I have no choice, as you will understand directly.'

'Tell me, Harry, who first thought of this way?'

'Vimpany, of course. Oh! give him the credit where real cleverness is concerned. Vimpany suggested the thing. He found me well-nigh as desperately hard up as he is himself. He suggested it. At first, I confess, I did not like it. I refused to listen to any more talk about it. But, you see, when one meets destitution face to face, one will do

anything—everything. Besides, as I will show you, this is not really a fraud. It is only an anticipation of a few years. However, there was another reason.'

'Was it to find the money to meet the promissory note?'

'My dear, you may forget—you may resolve never to throw the thing in my teeth; but my love for you will never suffer me to forget that I have lost your little fortune in a doubtful speculation. It is all gone, never to be recovered again; and this after I had sworn never to touch a farthing of it. Iris!' —he started to his feet and walked about the room as one who is agitated by emotion— 'Iris! I could face imprisonment for debt, I could submit to pecuniary ruin, for that matter; the loss of money would not cause me the least trouble, but I cannot endure to have ruined you.'

'Oh! Harry, as if I mind. Everything

that I have is yours. When I gave you myself I gave all. Take—use—lose it all. As you think, I should never *feel* reproach, far less utter a word of blame. Dearest Harry, if that is all——'

'No; it is the knowledge that you will not even feel reproach that is my constant accuser. At my death you will get all back again. But I am not old; I may live for many, many years to come. How can I wait for my own death when I can repair this wickedness by a single stroke?'

'But by another wickedness—and worse.'

'No—not another crime. Remember that this money is mine. It will come to my heirs some day, as surely as to-morrow's sun will rise. Sooner or later it will be mine; I will make it sooner, that is all. The Insurance Company will lose nothing but the paltry interest for the remainder of my life. My dear, if it is disgraceful to do this I will

endure disgrace. It is easier to bear than the constant self-reproach which I feel when I think of you and of the losses I have inflicted upon you.'

Again he folded her in his arms; he knelt before her: he wept over her. Carried out of herself by this passion, Iris made no more resistance.

'Is it—is it,' she asked timidly, 'too late to draw back?'

'It is too late,' he replied, thinking of the dead man below. 'It is too late. All is completed.'

'My poor Harry! What shall we do? How shall we live? How shall we contrive never to be found out?'

She would not leave him, then. She accepted the situation. He was amazed at the readiness with which she fell; but he did not understand how she was ready to cling to him, for better for worse, through worse evils

than this; nor could he understand how things formerly impossible to her had been rendered possible by the subtle deterioration of the moral nature, when a woman of lofty mind at the beginning loves and is united to a man of lower nature and coarser fibre than herself. Only a few months before, Iris would have swept aside these sophistries with swift and resolute hand. Now she accepted them.

'You have fallen into the doctor's hands, dear,' she said. 'Pray Heaven it brings us not into worse evils! What can I say? It is through love of your wife—through love of your wife—oh! husband!' she threw herself into his arms, and forgave everything and accepted everything. Henceforth she would be—though this she knew not—the willing instrument of the two conspirators.

CHAPTER LIV

ANOTHER STEP

'I HAVE left this terrible thing about once too often already,' and Lord Harry took it from the table. 'Let me put it in a place of safety.'

He unlocked a drawer and opened it. 'I will put it here,' he said. 'Why'—as if suddenly recollecting something—'here is my will. I shall be leaving that about on the table next. Iris, my dear, I have left everything to you. All will be yours.' He took out the document. 'Keep it for me, Iris. It is yours. You may as well have it now, and then I know, in your careful hands, it will be quite safe. Not only is everything left to you, but you are the sole executrix.'

Iris took the will without a word. She understood, now, what it meant. If she was the sole executrix she would have to act. If everything was left to her she would have to receive the money. Thus, at a single step, she became not only cognisant of the conspiracy, but the chief agent and instrument to carry it out.

This done, her husband had only to tell her what had to be done at once, in consequence of her premature arrival. He had planned, he told her, not to send for her—not to let her know or suspect anything of the truth until the money had been paid to the widow by the Insurance Company. As things had turned out, it would be best for both of them to leave Passy at once—that very evening—before her arrival was known by anybody, and to let Vimpany carry out the rest of the business. He was quite to be trusted—he would do everything that was wanted.

'Already,' he said, 'the Office will have received from the doctor a notification of my death. Yesterday evening he wrote to everybody—to my brother—confound him!—and to the family solicitor. Every moment that I stay here increases the danger of my being seen and recognised—after the Office has been informed that I am dead.'

'Where are we to go?'

'I have thought of that. There is a little quiet town in Belgium where no English people ever come at all. We will go there, then we will take another name; we will be buried to the outer world, and will live, for the rest of our lives, for ourselves alone. Do you agree?'

'I will do, Harry, whatever you think best.'

'It will be for a time only. When all is ready, you will have to step to the front—the will in your hand to be proved—to receive

what is due to you as the widow of Lord Harry Norland. You will go back to Belgium, after awhile, so as to disarm suspicion, to become once more the wife of William Linville.'

Iris sighed heavily. Then she caught her husband's eyes gathering with doubt, and she smiled again.

'In everything, Harry,' she said, 'I am your servant. When shall we start?'

'Immediately. I have only to write a letter to the doctor. Where is your bag? Is this all? Let me go first to see that no one is about. Have you got the will? Oh! it is here—yes—in the bag. I will bring along the bag.'

He ran downstairs, and came up quickly.

'The nurse has returned,' he said. 'She is in the spare room.'

'What nurse?'

'The nurse who came after Fanny left. The man was better, but the doctor thought

it wisest to have a nurse to the end,' he explained hurriedly, and she suspected nothing till afterwards. 'Come down quietly—go out by the back-door—she will not see you.' So Iris obeyed. She went out of her own house like a thief, or like her own maid Fanny, had she known. She passed through the garden, and out of the garden into the road. There she waited for her husband.

Lord Harry sat down and wrote a letter.

'Dear doctor,' he said, 'while you are arranging things outside an unexpected event has happened inside. Nothing happens but the unexpected. My wife has come back. It is the most unexpected event of any. Anything else might have happened. Most fortunately she has not seen the spare bedroom, and has no idea of its contents.

'At this point reassure yourself.

'My wife has gone.

'She found on the table your first print of

the negative. The sight of this before she saw me threw her into some kind of swoon, from which, however, she recovered.

'I have explained things to a certain point. She understands that Lord Harry Norland is deceased. She does not understand that it was necessary to have a funeral, there is no necessity to tell her of that. I think she understands that she must not seem to have been here. Therefore she goes away immediately.

'The nurse has not seen her. No one has seen her.

'She understands, further, that as the widow, heir, and executrix of Lord Harry she will have to prove his will, and to receive the money due to him by the Insurance Company. She will do this out of love for her husband. I think that the persuasive powers of a certain person have never yet been estimated at their true value.

'Considering the vital importance of getting her out of the place before she can learn anything of the spare bedroom, and of getting me out of the place before any messenger can arrive from the London office. I think you will agree with me that I am right in leaving Passy—and Paris—with Lady Harry this very afternoon.

'You may write to William Linville, Poste Restante, Louvain, Belgium. I am sure I can trust you to destroy this letter.

'Louvain is a quiet, out-of-the-way place, where one can live quite separated from all old friends, and very cheaply.

'Considering the small amount of money that I have left, I rely upon you to exercise the greatest economy. I do not know how long it may be before just claims are paid up—perhaps in two months—perhaps in six—but until things are settled there will be tightness.

'At the same time it will not be difficult, as soon as Lady Harry goes to London, to obtain some kind of advance from the family solicitor on the strength of the insurance due to her from her late husband.

'I am sorry, dear doctor, to leave you alone over the obsequies of this unfortunate gentleman. You will also have, I hear, a good deal of correspondence with his family. You may, possibly, have to see them in England. All this you will do, and do very well. Your bill for medical attendance you will do well to send in to the widow.

'One word more. Fanny Mere, the maid, has gone to London; but she has not seen Lady Harry. As soon as she hears that her mistress has left London she will be back to Passy. She may come at any moment. I think, if I were you, I would meet her at the garden-gate and send her on. It would be in-

convenient if she were to arrive before the funeral.

'My dear doctor, I rely on your sense, your prudence, and your capability.—Yours very sincerely,

'YOUR ENGLISH FRIEND.'

He read this letter very carefully. Nothing in it he thought the least dangerous, and yet something suggested danger. However, he left it; he was obliged to caution and warn the doctor, and he was obliged to get his wife away as quietly as possible.

This done, he packed up his things and hurried off to the station, and Passy saw him no more.

The next day the mortal remains of Lord Harry Norland were lowered into the grave.

CHAPTER LV

THE ADVENTURES OF A FAITHFUL MAID

IT was about five o'clock on Saturday afternoon. The funeral was over. The unfortunate young Irish gentleman was now lying in the cemetery of Auteuil in a grave purchased in perpetuity. His name, age, and rank were duly inscribed in the registers, and the cause of his death was vouched for by the English physician who had attended him at the request of his family. He was accompanied, in going through the formalities, by the respectable woman who had nursed the sick man during his last seizure. Everything was perfectly in order. The physician was the only mourner at the funeral. No

one was curious about the little procession. A funeral, more or less, excites no attention.

The funeral completed, the doctor gave orders for a simple monument to be put in memory of Lord Harry Norland, thus prematurely cut off. He then returned to the cottage, paid and dismissed the nurse, taking her address in case he should find an opportunity, as he hoped, to recommend her among his numerous and distinguished *clientèle*, and proceeded to occupy himself in setting everything in order before giving over the key to the landlord. First of all he removed the medicine bottles from the cupboard with great care, leaving nothing. Most of the bottles he threw outside into the dust-hole; one or two he placed in a fire which he made for the purpose in the kitchen: they were shortly reduced to two or three lumps of molten glass. These contained, no doubt, the mysteries and secrets of Science. Then he

went into every room and searched in every possible place for any letters or papers which might have been left about. Letters left about are always indiscreet, and the consequences of an indiscretion may be far-reaching and incalculable. Satisfied at last that the place was perfectly cleared, he sat down in the salon and continued his business correspondence with the noble family and the solicitors. Thus engaged, he heard footsteps outside, footsteps on the gravel, footsteps on the doorstep. He got up, not without the slightest show of nervousness, and opened the door. Lord Harry was right. There stood the woman who had been his first nurse—the woman who overheard and watched—the woman who suspected. The suspicion and the intention of watching were legible in her eyes still. She had come back to renew her watch.

In her hand she carried her box, which she had lugged along from the place where the

omnibus had deposited her. She made as if she were stepping in; but the big form of the doctor barred the way.

'Oh!' he said carelessly, 'it is you. Who told you to come back?'

'Is my mistress at home?'

'No; she is not.' He made no movement to let her pass.

'I will come in, please, and wait for her.'

He still stood in the way.

'What time will she return?'

'Have you heard from her?'

'No.'

'Did she leave orders that you were to follow her?'

'No; none that I received. I thought——'

'Servants should never think. They should obey.'

'I know my duty, Dr. Vimpany, without learning it from you. Will you let me pass?'

He withdrew and she entered.

'Come in, by all means,' he said, 'if you desire my society for a short time. But you will not find your mistress here.'

'Not here! Where is she then?'

'Had you waited in London for a day or two you would, I dare say, have been informed. As it is you have had your journey for nothing.'

'Has she not been here?'

'She has not been here.'

'Dr. Vimpany,' said the woman, driven to desperation, 'I don't believe you! I am certain she has been here. What have you done with her?'

'Don't you believe me? That is sad, indeed. But one cannot always help these wanderings. You do not believe me? Melancholy, truly!'

'You may mock as much as you like. Where is she?'

'Where, indeed?'

'She left London to join his lordship. Where is he?'

'I do not know. He who would answer that question would be a wise man indeed.'

'Can I see him?'

'Certainly not. He has gone away. On a long journey. By himself.'

'Then I shall wait for him. Here!' she added with decision. 'In this house!'

'By all means.'

She hesitated. There was an easy look about the doctor which she did not like.

'I believe,' she said, 'that my mistress is in the house. She must be in the house. What are you going to do with her? I believe you have put her somewhere.'

'Indeed!'

'You would do anything! I will go to the police.'

'If you please.'

'Oh! doctor, tell me where she is!'

'You are a faithful servant: it is good, in these days, to find a woman so zealous on account of her mistress. Come in, good and faithful. Search the house all over. Come in—what are you afraid of? Put down your box, and go and look for your mistress.' Fanny obeyed. She ran into the house, opened the doors of the salon and the dining-room one after the other: no one was there. She ran up the stairs and looked into her mistress's room: nothing was there, not even a ribbon or a hair-pin, to show the recent presence of a woman. She looked into Lord Harry's room. Nothing was there. If a woman leaves hair-pins about, a man leaves his tooth-brush: nothing at all was there. Then she threw open the armoire in each room: nothing behind the doors. She came downstairs slowly, wondering what it all meant.

'May I look in the spare room?' she asked, expecting to be roughly refused.

'By all means—by all means,' said the doctor, blandly. 'You know your way about. If there is anything left belonging to your mistress or to you, pray take it.'

She tried one more question.

'How is my patient? How is Mr. Oxbye?'

'He is gone.'

'Gone? Where has he gone to? Gone?'

'He went away yesterday—Friday. He was a grateful creature. I wish we had more such grateful creatures as well as more such faithful servants. He said something about finding his way to London in order to thank you properly. A good soul, indeed!'

'Gone?' she repeated. 'Why, on Thursday morning I saw him——' She checked herself in time.

'It was on Wednesday morning that you

saw him, and he was then recovering rapidly.'

'But he was far too weak to travel.'

'You may be quite certain that I should not have allowed him to go away unless he was strong enough.'

Fanny made no reply. She had seen with her own eyes the man lying still and white, as if in death; she had seen the new nurse rushing off, crying that he was dead. Now she was told that he was quite well, and that he had gone away! But it was no time for thought.

She was on the point of asking where the new nurse was, but she remembered in time that it was best for her to know nothing, and to awaken no suspicions. She opened the door of the spare room and looked in. Yes; the man was gone—dead or alive—and there were no traces left of his presence. The place was cleared up; the cupboard stood with open doors, empty; the bed was made; the cur-

tain pushed back; the sofa was in its place against the wall; the window stood open. Nothing in the room at all to show that there had been an occupant only two days before. She stared blankly. The dead man was gone, then. Had her senses altogether deceived her? Was he not dead, but only sleeping? Was her horror only a thing of imagination? Behind her, in the hall, stood the doctor, smiling, cheerful.

She remembered that her first business was to find her mistress. She was not connected with the Dane. She closed the door and returned to the hall.

'Well,' asked the doctor, 'have you made any discoveries? You see that the house is deserted. You will perhaps learn before long why. Now what will you do? Will you go back to London?'

'I must find her ladyship.'

The doctor smiled.

'Had you come here in a different spirit,' he said, 'I would have spared you all this trouble. You come, however, with suspicion written on your face. You have always been suspecting and watching. It may be in a spirit of fidelity to your mistress; but such a spirit is not pleasing to other people, especially when there is not a single person who bears any resentment towards that mistress. Therefore, I have allowed you to run over the empty house, and to satisfy your suspicious soul. Lady Harry is not hidden here. As for Lord Harry—but you will hear in due time, no doubt. And now I don't mind telling you that I have her ladyship's present address.'

'Oh! What is it?'

'She appears to have passed through Paris on her way to Switzerland two days ago, and has sent here her address for the next fortnight. She has now, I suppose,

arrived there. The place is Berne; the Hôtel—— But how do I know that she wants you?'

'Of course she wants me.'

'Or of course you want her? Very good. Yours is the responsibility, not mine. Her address is the Hôtel d'Angleterre. Shall I write it down for you? There it is. "Hôtel d'Angleterre, Berne." Now you will not forget. She will remain there for one fortnight only. After that, I cannot say whither she may go. And, as all her things have been sent away, and as I am going away, I am not likely to hear.'

'Oh! I must go to her. I must find her!' cried the woman, earnestly; 'if it is only to make sure that no evil is intended for her.'

'That is your business. For my own part, I know of no one who can wish her ladyship any evil.'

'Is my lord with her?'

'I don't know whether that is your business. I have already told you that he is gone. If you join your mistress in Berne, you will very soon find out if he is there as well.' Something in his tone made Fanny look up quickly. But his face revealed nothing. 'What shall you do then?' asked the doctor. 'You must make up your mind quickly whether you will go back to England or whether you will go on to Switzerland. You cannot stay here, because I am putting together the last things, and I shall give the landlord the key of the house this evening. All the bills are paid, and I am going to leave the place.'

'I do not understand. There is the patient,' she murmured vaguely. 'What does it mean? I cannot understand.'

'My good creature,' he replied roughly, 'what the devil does it matter to me whether

you understand or whether you do not understand? Her ladyship is, as I have told you, at Berne. If you please to follow her there, do so. It is your own affair, not mine. If you prefer to go back to London, do so. Still—your own affair. Is there anything else to say?'

'Nothing.' Fanny took up her box—this time the doctor did not offer to carry it for her.

'Where are you going?' he asked. 'What have you decided?'

'I can get round by the Chemin-de-Fer de Ceinture to the Lyons station. I shall take the first cheap train which will take me to Berne.'

'Bon voyage!' said the doctor, cheerfully, and shut the door.

It is a long journey from Paris to Berne even for those who can travel first class and

express—that is, if sixteen hours can be called a long journey. For those who have to jog along by third class, stopping at all the little country stations, it is a long and a tedious journey indeed. The longest journey ends at last. The train rolled slowly into the station of Berne, and Fanny descended with her box. Her wanderings were over for the present. She would find her mistress and be at rest.

She asked to be directed to the Hôtel d'Angleterre. The Swiss guardian of the peace with the cocked hat stared at her. She repeated the question.

'Hôtel d'Angleterre?' he echoed. 'There is no Hôtel d'Angleterre in Berne.'

'Yes, yes; there is. I am the maid of a lady who is staying at that hotel.'

'No; there is no Hôtel d'Angleterre,' he repeated. 'There is the Hôtel Bernerhof.'

'No.' She took out the paper and showed it to him—'Lady Harry Norland, Hôtel d'Angleterre, Berne.'

'There is the Hôtel de Belle Vue, the Hôtel du Faucon, the Hôtel Victoria, the Hôtel Schweizerhof. There is the Hôtel Schrödel, the Hôtel Schneider, the Pension Simkin.'

Fanny as yet had no other suspicion than that the doctor had accidentally written a wrong name. Her mistress was at Berne: she would be in one of the hotels. Berne is not a large place. Very good; she would go round to the hotels and inquire. She did so. There are not, in fact, more than half-a-dozen hotels in Berne where an English lady could possibly stay. Fanny went to every one of these. No one had heard of any such lady: they showed her the lists of their visitors. She inquired at the post-office. No lady of that name had asked for letters. She

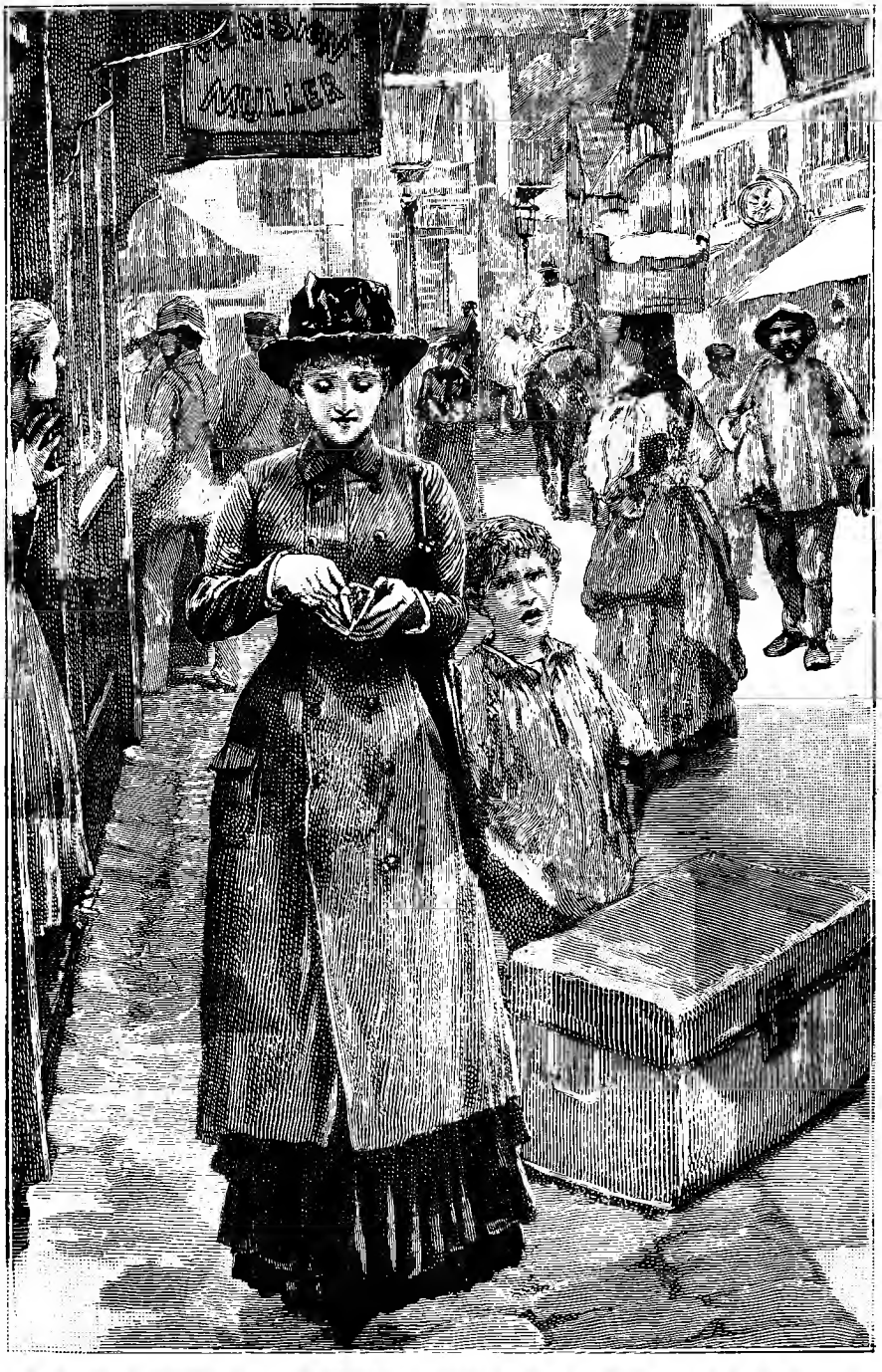
asked if there were any pensions, and went round them all—uselessly.

No other conclusion was possible. The doctor had deceived her wilfully. To get her out of the way he sent her to Berne. He would have sent her to Jericho if her purse had been long enough to pay the fare. She was tricked.

She counted her money. There was exactly twenty-eight shillings and tenpence in her purse.

She went back to the cheapest (and dirtiest) of the pensions she had visited. She stated her case—she had missed milady her mistress—she must stay until she should receive orders to go on, and money—would they take her in until one or the other arrived? Certainly. They would take her in, at five francs a day, payable every morning in advance.

She made a little calculation—she had



She counted her money. There was exactly twenty-eight shillings and tenpence in her purse.

twenty-eight and tenpence; exactly thirty-five francs—enough for seven days. If she wrote to Mrs. Vimpany at once she could get an answer in five days.

She accepted the offer, paid her five shillings, was shown into a room, and was informed that the dinner was served at six o'clock.

Very good. Here she could rest, at any rate, and think what was to be done. And first she wrote two letters — one to Mrs. Vimpany and one to Mr. Mountjoy.

In both of these letters she told exactly what she had found: neither Lord Harry nor his wife at the cottage, the place vacated, and the doctor on the point of going away. In both letters she told how she had been sent all the way into Switzerland on a fool's errand, and now found herself planted there without the means of getting home. In the letter to Mrs. Vimpany she added the re-

markable detail that the man whom she had seen on the Thursday morning apparently dead, whose actual poisoning she thought she had witnessed, was reported on the Saturday to have walked out of the cottage, carrying his things, if he had any, and proposing to make his way to London in order to find out his old nurse. 'Make what you can out of that,' she said. 'For my own part, I understand nothing.'

In the letter which she wrote to Mr. Mountjoy she added a petition that he would send her money to bring her home. This, she said, her mistress she knew would willingly defray.

She posted these letters on Tuesday, and waited for the answers.

Mrs. Vimpany wrote back by return post.

'My dear Fanny,' she said, 'I have read your letter with the greatest interest. I am

not only afraid that some villany is afloat, but I am perfectly sure of it. One can only hope and pray that her ladyship may be kept out of its influence. You will be pleased to hear that Mr. Mountjoy is better. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered to stand the shock of violent emotion, I put Lady Harry's letter into his hands. It was well that I had kept it from him, for he fell into such a violence of grief and indignation that I thought he would have had a serious relapse. "Can any woman," he cried, "be justified in going back to an utterly unworthy husband until he has proved a complete change? What if she has received a thousand letters of penitence? Penitence should be shown by acts, not words: she should have waited." He wrote her a letter, which he showed me. "Is there," he asked, "anything in the letter which could justly offend her?" I could find nothing. He told her, but I fear too late, that she risks

degradation—perhaps worse, if there is anything worse—if she persists in returning to her unworthy husband. If she refuses to be guided by his advice, on the last occasion on which he would presume to offer any advice, he begged that she would not answer. Let her silence say—No. That was the substance of his letter. Up to the present moment no answer has been received from Lady Harry. Nor has he received so much as an acknowledgment of the letter. What can be understood by this silence? Clearly, refusal.

'You must return by way of Paris, though it is longer than by Basle and Laon. Mr. Mountjoy, I know, will send you the money you want. He has told me as much. "I have done with Lady Harry," he said. "Her movements no longer concern me, though I can never want interest in what she does. But since the girl is right to stick to her mistress, I will send her the money—not as a

loan to be paid back by Iris, but as a gift from myself."

'Therefore, my dear Fanny, stop in Paris for one night at least, and learn what has been done if you can. Find out the nurse, and ask her what really happened. With the knowledge that you already possess, it will be hard, indeed, if we cannot arrive at the truth. There must be people who supplied things to the cottage—the restaurant, the *pharmacien*, the laundress. See them all—you know them already, and we will put the facts together. As for finding her ladyship, that will depend entirely upon herself. I shall expect you back in about a week. If anything happens here I shall be able to tell you when you arrive.

'Yours affectionately,

'L. VIMPANY.'

This letter exactly coincided with Fanny's

own views. The doctor was now gone. She was pretty certain that he was not going to remain alone in the cottage; and the suburb of Passy, though charming in many ways, is not exactly the place for a man of Dr. Vimpany's temperament. She would stay a day, or even two days, or more, if necessary, at Passy. She would make those inquiries.

The second letter, which reached her the same day, was from Mr. Mountjoy. He told her what he had told Mrs. Vimpany: he would give her the money because he recognised the spirit of fidelity which caused Fanny to go first to Paris and then to Berne. But he could not pretend to any right to interference in the affairs of Lord and Lady Harry Norland. He inclosed a *mandat postal* for a hundred and twenty-five francs, which he hoped would be sufficient for her immediate wants.

She started on her return journey on the

same day—namely, Saturday. On Sunday evening she was in a pension at Passy, ready to make those inquiries. The first person whom she sought out was the *rentier*—the landlord of the cottage. He was a retired tradesman—one who had made his modest fortune in a *charcuterie*, and had invested it in house property. Fanny told him that she had been lady's-maid to Lady Harry Norland in the recent occupancy of the cottage, and that she was anxious to know her present address.

'Merci, mon Dieu! que sais-je? What do I know about it?' he replied. 'The wife of the English milord is so much attached to her husband that she leaves him in his long illness——'

'His long illness?'

'Certainly—Mademoiselle is not, perhaps, acquainted with the circumstances—his long illness; and does not come even to see his

dead body after he is dead. There is a wife for you—a wife of the English fashion!'

Fanny gasped.

'After he is dead! Is Lord Harry dead? When did he die?'

'But, assuredly, Mademoiselle has not heard? The English milord died on Thursday morning, a week and more ago, of consumption, and was buried in the cemetery of Auteuil last Saturday. Mademoiselle appears astonished.'

'En effet, Monsieur, I am astonished.'

'Already the tombstone is erected to the memory of the unhappy young man, who is said to belong to a most distinguished family of Ireland. Mademoiselle can see it with her own eyes in the cemetery.'

'One word more, Monsieur. If Monsieur would have the kindness to tell her who was the nurse of milord in his last seizure.'

'But certainly. All the world knows the

widow La Chaise. It was the widow La Chaise who was called in by the doctor. Ah! there is a man—what a man! What a miracle of science! What devotion to his friend! What admirable sentiments! Truly, the English are great in sentiments when their insular coldness allows them to speak. This widow can be found—easily found.'

He gave Fanny, in fact, the nurse's address. Armed with this, and having got out of the landlord the cardinal fact of Lord Harry's alleged death, the lady's-maid went in search of this respectable widow.

She found her in her own apartments, a respectable woman indeed, perfectly ready to tell everything that she knew, and evidently quite unsuspicious of anything wrong. She was invited to take charge of a sick man on the morning of Thursday: she was told that he was a young Irish lord, dangerously ill of a pulmonary disorder; the doctor, in fact,

informed her that his life hung by a thread, and might drop at any moment, though on the other hand he had known such cases linger on for many months. She arrived as she had been ordered, at midday: she was taken into the sick-room by the doctor, who showed her the patient placidly sleeping on a sofa: the bed had been slept in, and was not yet made. After explaining the medicines which she was to administer, and the times when they were to be given, and telling her something about his diet, the doctor left her alone with the patient.

'He was still sleeping profoundly,' said the nurse.

'You are sure that he was sleeping, and not dead?' asked Fanny, sharply.

'Mademoiselle, I have been a nurse for many years. I know my duties. The moment the doctor left me I verified his statements. I proved that the patient was

sleeping by feeling his pulse and observing his breath.'

Fanny made no reply. She could hardly remind this respectable person that after the doctor left her she employed herself first in examining the cupboards, drawers, *armoire*, and other things; that she then found a book with pictures, in which she read for a quarter of an hour or so; that she then grew sleepy and dropped the book——

'I then,' continued the widow, 'made arrangements against his waking—that is to say, I drew back the curtains and turned over the sheet to air the bed'—O Madame! Madame! Surely this was needless!—'shook up the pillows, and occupied myself in the cares of a conscientious nurse until the time came to administer the first dose of medicine. Then I proceeded to awaken my patient. Figure to yourself! He whom I had left tranquilly breathing, with the regularity of a

convalescent rather than a dying man, was dead! He was dead!'

'You are sure he was dead?'

'As if I had never seen a dead body before! I called the doctor, but it was for duty only, for I knew that he was dead.'

'And then?'

'Then the doctor—who must also have known that he was dead—felt his pulse and his heart, and looked at his eyes, and declared that he was dead.'

'And then?'

'What then? If a man is dead he is dead. You cannot restore him to life. Yet one thing the doctor did. He brought a camera and took a photograph of the dead man for the sake of his friends.'

'Oh! he took a photograph of—of Lord Harry Norland. What did he do that for?'

'I tell you: for the sake of his friends.'

Fanny was more bewildered than ever.

Why on earth should the doctor want a photograph of the Dane Oxbye to show the friends of Lord Harry? Could he have made a blunder as stupid as it was uncalled for? No one could possibly mistake the dead face of that poor Dane for the dead face of Lord Harry.

She had got all the information she wanted—all, in fact, that was of any use to her. One thing remained. She would see the grave.

The cemetery of Auteuil is not so large as that of Père-la-Chaise, nor does it contain so many celebrated persons as the latter—perhaps the greatest cemetery, as regards its illustrious dead, in the whole world. It is the cemetery of the better class. The tombs are not those of Immortals but of Respectables.

Among them Fanny easily found, following the directions given to her, the tomb he was searching after.

On it was written in English, 'Sacred to the Memory of Lord Harry Norland, second son of the Marquis of Malven.' Then followed the date and the age, and nothing more.

Fanny sat down on a bench and contemplated this mendacious stone.

'The Dane Oxbye,' she said, 'was growing better fast when I went away. That was the reason why I was sent away. The very next day the doctor, thinking me far away, poisoned him. I saw him do it. The nurse was told that he was asleep, and being left alone presently discovered that he was dead. She has been told that the sick man is a young Irish gentleman. He is buried under the name of Lord Harry. That is the reason I found the doctor alone. And my lady? Where is she?'

CHAPTER LVI

FANNY'S NARRATIVE

FANNY returned to London. Partly, the slenderness of her resources gave her no choice; partly, she had learned all there was to learn, and would do no good by staying longer at Passy.

She arrived with thirty shillings left out of Mr. Mountjoy's timely gift. She sought a cheap lodging, and found a room, among people who seemed respectable, which she could have for four-and-sixpence a week, with board at a shilling a day. This settled, she hastened to Mr. Mountjoy's hotel brimful of her news for Mrs. Vimpany.

Everyone knows the disappointment when

the one person in the world whom you want at the moment to see and to talk with proves to be out. Then the news has to be suppressed; the conclusions, the suspicions, the guesses have to be postponed; the active brain falls back upon itself.

This disappointment—almost as great as that at Berne—was experienced by Fanny Mere at the hotel.

Mr. Mountjoy was no longer there.

The landlady of the hotel, who knew Fanny, came out herself, and told her what had happened.

'He was better,' she said, 'but still weak. They sent him down to Scotland in Mrs. Vimpany's care. He was to travel by quick or slow stages, just as he felt able. And I've got the address for you. Here it is. Oh! and Mrs. Vimpany left a message. Will you, she says, when you write, send the letter to her and not to him? She says you know why.'

Fanny returned to her lodging profoundly discouraged. She was filled with this terrible secret that she had discovered. The only man who could advise at this juncture was Mr. Mountjoy, and he was gone. And she knew not what had become of her mistress. What could she do? The responsibility was more than she could bear.

The conversation with the French nurse firmly established one thing in her mind. The man who was buried in the cemetery of Auteuil with the name of Lord Harry Norland on a headstone, the man who had lingered so long with pulmonary disease, was the man whose death she had witnessed. It was Oxbye the Dane. Of that there could be no doubt. Equally there was no doubt in her own mind that he had been poisoned by the doctor—by Mrs. Vimpany's husband—in the presence and, to all appearance, with the consent and full knowledge of Lord Harry him-

self. Then her mistress was in the power of these two men—villains who had now added murder to their other crimes. As for herself, she was alone, almost friendless ; in a week or two she would be penniless. If she told her tale, what mischief might she not do? If she was silent, what mischief might not follow?

She sat down to write to the only friend she had. But her trouble froze her brain. She had not been able to put the case plainly. Words failed her.

She was not at any time fluent with her pen. She now found herself really unable to convey any intelligible account of what had happened. To state clearly all that she knew so that the conclusion should be obvious and patent to the reader would have been at all times difficult, and was now impossible. She could only confine herself to a simple vague statement. 'I can only say that from all I have seen and heard I have reasons

for believing that Lord Harry is not dead at all.' She felt that this was a feeble way of summing up, but she was not at the moment equal to more. 'When I write again, after I have heard from you, I will tell you more. To-day I cannot. I am too much weighed down. I am afraid of saying too much. Besides, I have no money, and must look for work. I am not anxious, however, about my own future, because my lady will not forsake me. I am sure of that. It is my anxiety about her and the dreadful secrets I have learned which give me no rest.'

Several days passed before the answer came. And then it was an answer which gave her little help. 'I have no good news for you,' she said. 'Mr. Mountjoy continues weak. Whatever your secret, I cannot ask you to communicate it to him in his present condition. He has been grieved and angry beyond all belief by Lady Harry's decision to

rejoin her husband. It is hard to understand that a man should be so true a friend and so constant a lover. Yet he has brought himself to declare that he has broken off all friendly relations with her. He could no longer endure London. It was associated with thoughts and memories of her. In spite of his weak condition, he insisted on coming down here to his Scotch villa. Ill as he was, he would brook no delay. We came down by very easy stages, stopping at Peterborough, York, Durham, Newcastle, and Berwick—at some places for one night, and others for more. In spite of all my precautions, when we arrived at the villa he was dangerously exhausted. I sent for the local doctor, who seems to know something. At all events, he is wise enough to understand that this is not a case for drugs. Complete rest and absence from all agitating thoughts must be aimed at. Above all, he is not to see the newspapers. That is fortunate,

because, I suppose, Lord Harry's death has been announced in them, and the thought that his former mistress is a widow might excite him very dangerously. You will now understand why I left that message at the hotel for you, and why I have not shown him your letter. I told him, it is true, that you had returned without finding your mistress. "Speak no more to me of Lady Harry," he replied irritably. So I have said no more. As for money, I have a few pounds by me, which are at your service. You can repay me at some future time. I have thought of one thing—that new Continental paper started by Lord Harry. Wherever she may be, Lady Harry is almost sure to see that. Put an advertisement in it addressed to her, stating that you have not heard of her address, but that you yourself will receive any letter sent to some post-office which you can find. I think that such an advertisement will draw a

reply from her, unless she desires to remain in seclusion.'

Fanny thought the suggestion worth adopting. After careful consideration, she drew up an advertisement:—

'Fanny M. to L—— H——. I have not been able to ascertain your address. Please write to me, at the Post-office, Hunter Street, London, W.C.'

She paid for the insertion of this advertisement three times on alternate Saturdays. They told her that this would be a more likely way than to take three successive Saturdays. Then, encouraged by the feeling that something, however little, had been done, she resolved to sit down and to write out a narrative in which she would set down in order everything that had happened—exactly as it had happened. Her intense hatred and suspicion of Dr. Vimpany aided her, strange

to say, to keep to the strictest fidelity as regards the facts. For it was not her desire to make up charges and accusations. She wanted to find out the exact truth, and so to set it down that anybody who read her statement would arrive at the same conclusion as she herself had done. In the case of an eye-witness there are thousands of things which cannot be produced in evidence which yet are most important in directing and confirming suspicions. The attitude, the voice, the look of a speaker, the things which he conceals as well as the things which he reveals—all these are evidence. But these Fanny was unable to set down. Therefore it behoved her to be strictly careful.

First, she stated how she became aware that there was some secret scheme under consideration between Lord Harry and the doctor. Next, she set down the fact that they began to talk French to each other,

thinking that she could not understand them; that they spoke of deceiving Lady Harry by some statement which had already deceived the authorities; that the doctor undertook to get the lady out of the house; that they engaged herself as nurse to a sick man; that she suspected from the beginning that their design was to profit in some way by the death of this sick man, who bore a slight resemblance to Lord Harry himself. And so on, following the story as closely as she could remember, to the death of the Dane and her own subsequent conversation with the nurse. She was careful to put in the dates, day after day. When she had done all this—it took a good deal of time—she bought a manuscript book and copied it all out. This enabled her to remember two or three facts which had escaped her at the beginning. Then she made another copy—this time without names of people or place. The second copy she

forwarded as a registered letter to Mrs. Vimpany, with a letter of which this was the conclusion: 'Considering, therefore, that on Wednesday morning I left Lord Harry in perfect health; considering that on the Thursday morning I saw the man who had been ill so long actually die—how, I have told you in the packet enclosed; considering that the nurse was called in purposely to attend a patient who was stated to have long been ill—there can be no doubt whatever that the body in the cemetery is that of the unfortunate Dane, Oxbye; and that, somewhere or other, Lord Harry is alive and well.

'What have they done it for? First of all, I suppose, to get money. If it were not for the purpose of getting money the doctor would have had nothing to do with the conspiracy, which was his own invention. That is very certain. Your idea was they would try to get money out of the insurance offices.

I suppose that is their design. But Lord Harry may have many other secret reasons of his own for wishing to be thought dead. They say his life has been full of wicked things, and he may well wish to be considered dead and gone. Lots of wicked men would like above all things, I should think, to be considered dead and buried. But the money matter is at the bottom of all, I am convinced. What are we to do?'

What could they do. These two women had got hold of a terrible secret. Neither of them could move. It was too big a thing. One cannot expect a woman to bring her own husband—however wicked a husband he may be—to the awful shame and horror of the gallows if murder should be proved—or to a lifelong imprisonment if the conspiracy alone should be brought home to him. Therefore Mrs. Vimpany could do nothing. As for Fanny, the mere thought of the pain she

would inflict upon her mistress, were Lord Harry through her interference to be brought to justice and an infamous sentence, kept her quiet.

Meantime, the announcement of Lord Harry's death had been made. Those who knew the family history spoke cheerfully of the event. 'Best thing he had ever done. Very good thing for his people. One more bad lot out of the way. Dead, Sir, and a very good thing too. Married, I believe. One of the men who have done everything. Pity they can't write a life of him.' These were the comments made upon the decease of this young gentleman. Such is fame. Next day he was clean forgotten; just as if he had never existed. Such is life.

CHAPTER LVII

AT LOUVAIN

NOT many English tourists go out of their way to visit Louvain, even though it has a Hôtel de Ville surpassing even that of Brussels itself, and though one can get there in an hour from that city of youth and pleasure. And there are no English residents at all in the place—at least, none in evidence, though perhaps there may be some who have gone there for the same reasons which led Mr. William Linville and his wife to choose this spot—in order to be private and secluded. There are many more people than we know of who desire, above all things, seclusion and retirement, and dread

nothing so much as a chance meeting with an old friend.

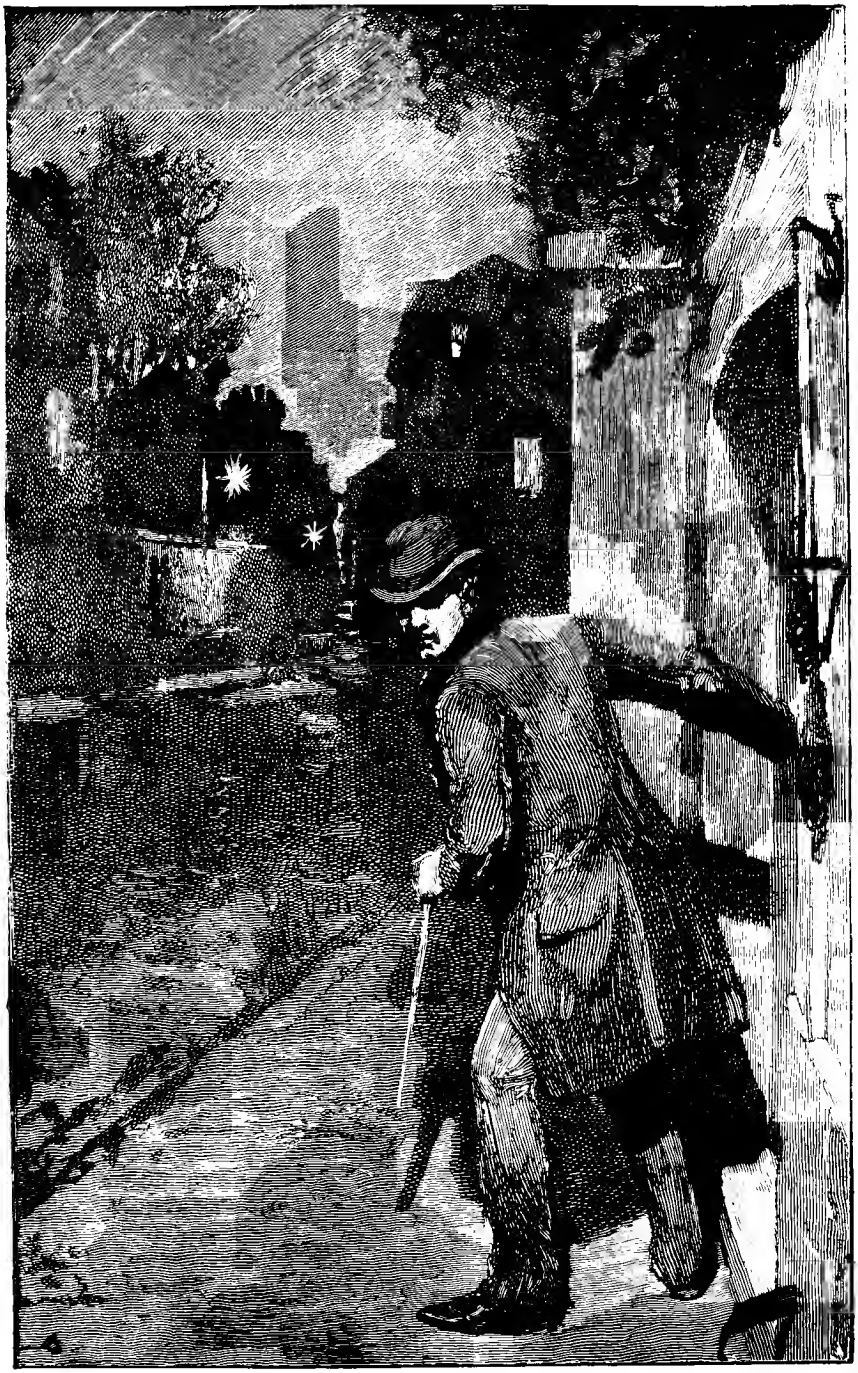
Mr. William Linville took a small house, furnished, like the cottage at Passy, and, also like that little villa, standing in its own garden. Here, with a cook and a maid, Iris set up her modest *ménage*. To ask whether she was happy would be absurd. At no time since her marriage had she been happy: to live under the condition of perpetual concealment is not in itself likely to make a woman any the happier. Fortunately she had no time to experience the full bitterness of the plan proposed by her husband.

Consider. Had their scheme actually been carried out quite successfully, this pair, still young, would have found themselves condemned to transportation for life. That was the first thing. Next, they could never make any friends among their own countrymen or countrywomen for fear of discovery. Iris

could never again speak to an English lady. If they had children the risk would appear ten times more terrible, the consequences ten times more awful. The children themselves would have to grow up without family and without friends. The husband, cut off from intercourse with other men, would be thrown back upon himself. Husband and wife, with this horrible load laid upon them, would inevitably grow to loathe and hate the sight of each other. The man would almost certainly take to drink ; the woman—but we must not follow this line any further. The situation lasted only so long as to give the wife a glimpse of what it might become in the future.

They took their house, and sat down in it.

They were very silent. Lord Harry, his great *coup* successfully carried so far, sat taciturn and glum. He stayed indoors all day, only venturing out after dark. For



He stayed indoors all day, only venturing out after dark.

a man whose whole idea of life was motion, society, and action, this promised ill.

The monotony was first broken by the arrival of Hugh's letter, which was sent in with other documents from Passy. Iris read it; she read it again, trying to understand exactly what it meant. Then she tore it up. 'If he only knew,' she said, 'he would not have taken the trouble even to write this letter. There is no answer, Hugh. There can be none—now. Act by your advice? Henceforth, I must act by order. I am a conspirator.'

Two days afterwards came a letter from the doctor. He did not think it necessary to say anything about Fanny's appearance or her journey to Berne. 'Everything,' he wrote, 'has so far gone well. The world knows, through the papers, that Lord Harry is dead. There will be now only the business of claiming the money. For this purpose, as

his widow is the sole heiress and executrix, it will be necessary for her to place the will and the policies of insurance in the hands of her husband's lawyers, so that the will may be proved and the claims duly made. Forms will have to be signed. The medical certificate of death and the forms attesting the burial are already in the lawyers' hands. The sooner the widow goes to London the better. She should write to announce her arrival, and she should write from Paris as if she had been staying there after her husband's death.

'I have only to remind you, my dear Linville, that you are indebted to me in a good round sum. Of course, I shall be very pleased to receive a cheque for this sum in full as soon as you have touched the amount due to you. I shall be in Paris, at the Hôtel Continental, where you may address me. Naturally, there is no desire for concealment, and if the Insurance Companies desire any

information from me I am always ready and willing to afford it.'

Lord Harry gave this letter to his wife.

She read it, and laid it open in her lap.

'Must it be, Harry? Oh! must it be?'

'There is no other way possible, dear. But really it is nothing. You were not at Passy when your husband died. You had been in London—you were in Brussels—anywhere; when you arrived it was all over; you have seen his headstone. Dr. Vimpany had him in his care; you knew he was ill, but you thought it was a trifling matter which time would cure; you go to the lawyers and present the will. They have the policies, and will do everything else; you will not even have to sign anything. The only thing that you must do is to get a complete rig-out of widow's weeds. Mind—there will not be the slightest doubt or question raised. Considering everything, you will be more

than justified in seeing no one and going nowhere.'

Hugh's letter breaking in upon her fool's paradise had awakened the poor woman to her better self; she had gone so far with the fraud as to acquiesce in it; but she recoiled with horror and shame when this active part was forced upon her.

'Oh, Harry!'—she burst into tears. 'I cannot—I cannot. You ask me to be a liar and a thief—oh! heavens!—a vile thief!'

'It is too late, Iris! We are all vile thieves. It is too late to begin crying now.'

'Harry'—she threw herself upon her knees—'spare me! Let some other woman go, and call herself your widow. Then I will go away and hide myself.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Iris,' he replied roughly. 'I tell you it is far too late. You should have thought of this before. It is now all arranged.'

'I cannot go,' she said.

'You must go; otherwise, all our trouble may prove useless.'

'Then I will not go!' she declared, springing to her feet. 'I will not degrade myself any further. I will not go!'

Harry rose too. He faced her for a moment. His eyes dropped. Even he remembered, at that moment, how great must be the fall of a woman who would consent to play such a part!

'You shall not go,' he said, 'unless you like. You can leave me to the consequences of my own acts—to my own degradation. Go back to England. In one thing only spare me. Do not tell what you know. As for me, I will forge a letter from you——'

'Forge a letter!'

'It is the only way left open, giving the lawyers authority to act, and inclosing the will. What will happen next? By whose

hands the money is to reach me I know not yet. But you can leave me, Iris. Better that you should leave me—I shall only drag you lower.'

'Why must you forge the letter? Why not come with me somewhere—the world is large!—to some place where you are not known, and there let us begin a new life? We have not much money, but I can sell my watches and chains and rings, and we shall have enough. O Harry! for once be guided—listen to me! We shall find some humble manner of living, and we may be happy yet. There is no harm done if you have only pretended to be dead; nobody has been injured or defrauded——'

'Iris, you talk wildly! Do you imagine, for one moment, that the doctor will release me from my bargain?'

'What bargain?'

'Why—of course he was to be paid for

the part he has taken in the business. Without him it could never have been done at all.'

'Yes—yes—it was in the letter that you gave me,' she said, conscious that such agreements belonged to works of fiction and to police courts.

'Certainly I have to pay him a good large slice out of the money.'

'It is fifteen thousand pounds, is it not? How much is to be paid to the—to the doctor?'

'We agreed that he was to have the half,' said Lord Harry, laughing lightly. 'But as I thought that seven thousand five hundred pounds was a sum of money which would probably turn his head and bring him to starvation in a year or two, I told him that the whole amount was four thousand pounds. Therefore he is to have two thousand pounds for his share. And quite enough too.'

'Treachery on treachery!' said his wife

'Fraud on fraud! Would to GOD,' she added with a sigh, 'that you had never met this man!'

'I daresay it would have been better for me, on the whole,' he replied. 'But then, my dear, a man like myself is always meeting people whom it would have been better not to have met. Like will to like, I suppose. Given the active villain and the passive consenter, and they are sure to meet. Not that I throw stones at the worthy doctor. Not at all.'

'We cannot, Harry,' said his wife.

'We cannot, my dear. Bien entendu! Well, Iris, there is no more to be said. You know the situation completely. You can back out of it if you please, and leave me. Then I shall have to begin all over again a new conspiracy far more dangerous than the last. Well, I shall not drag you down with me. That is my resolution. If it comes to public

degradation—but it shall not. Iris, I promise you one thing.' For once he looked as if he meant it. 'Death before dishonour. Death without your name being mixed up at all, save with pity for being the wife of such a man.'

Again he conquered her.

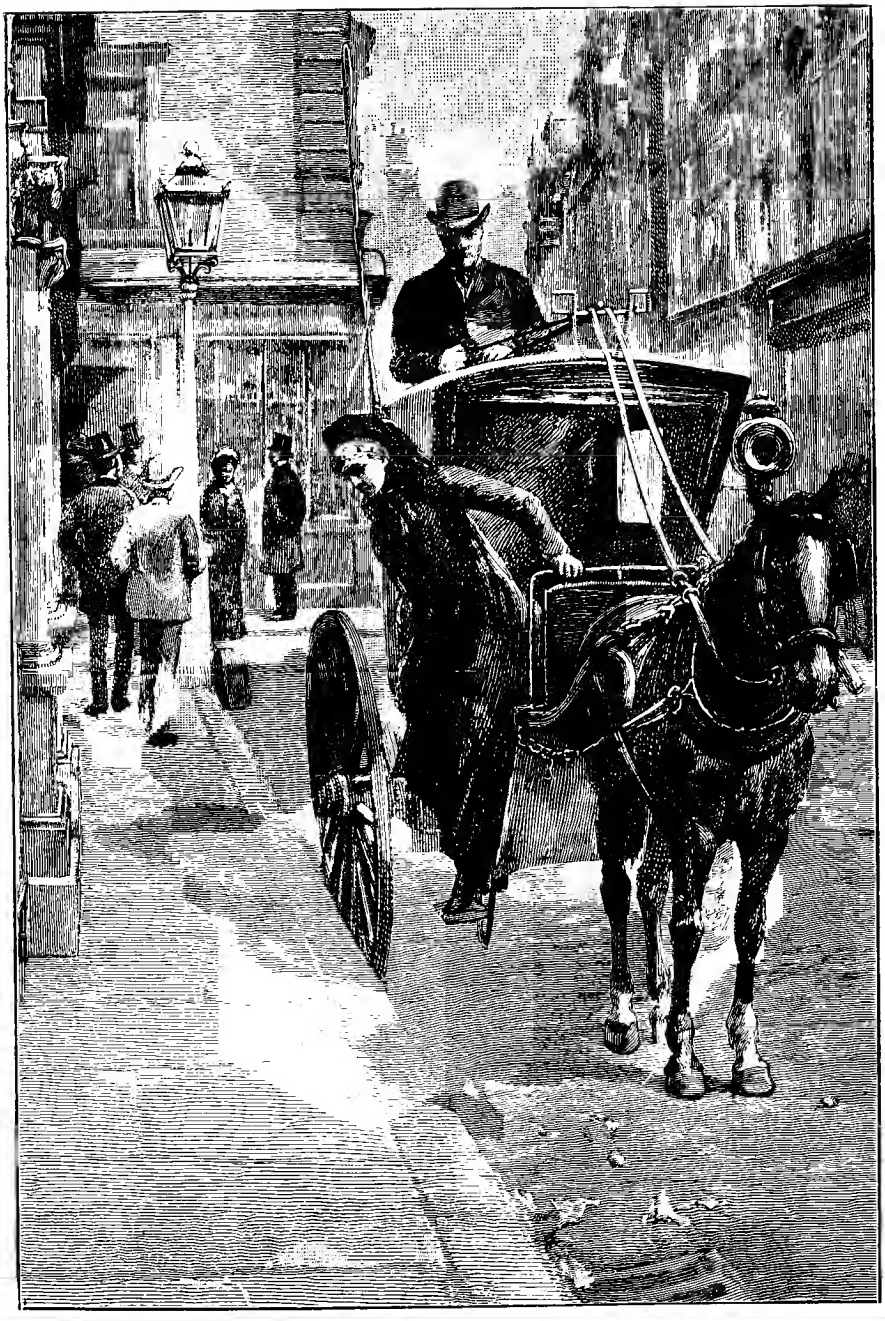
'Harry,' she said, 'I will go.'

CHAPTER LVIII

'OF COURSE THEY WILL PAY'

THREE days afterwards a hansom cab drove to the offices of the very respectable firm of solicitors who managed the affairs of the Norland family. They had one or two other families as well, and, in spite of agricultural depression, they made a very good thing indeed out of a very comfortable business. The cab contained a lady in deep widow's weeds.

Lady Harry Norland expected to be received with coldness and suspicion. Her husband, she knew, had not led the life expected in these days of a younger son. Nor had his record been such as to endear



A hansom cab drove to the offices of the very respectable firm of solicitors.

him to his elder brother. Then, as may be imagined, there were other tremors, caused by a guilty knowledge of certain facts which might by some accident 'come out.' Everybody has tremors for whom something may come out. Also, Iris had had no experience of solicitors, and was afraid of them.

Instead of being received, however, by a gentleman as solemn as the Court of Chancery and as terrible as the Court of Assize, she found an elderly gentleman, of quiet, paternal manners, who held both her hands, and looked as if he was weeping over her bereavement. By long practice this worthy person could always, at a moment's notice, assume the appearance of one who was weeping with his client.

'My dear lady!' he murmured. 'My dear lady! This is a terrible time for you.'

She started. She feared that something had come out.

'In the moment of bereavement, too, to think of business.'

'I have brought you,' she replied curtly, 'my husband's—my late husband's—will.'

'Thank you. With your permission—though it may detain your ladyship—I will read it. Humph! it is short and to the point. This will certainly give us little trouble. I fear, however, that, besides the insurances, your ladyship will not receive much.'

'Nothing. My husband was always a poor man, as you know. At the time of his death he left a small sum of money only. I am, as a matter of fact, greatly inconvenienced.'

'Your ladyship shall be inconvenienced no longer. You must draw upon us. As regards Lord Harry's death, we are informed by Dr. Vimpany, who seems to have been his friend as well as his medical adviser——'

'Dr. Vimpany had been living with him for some time.'

—'that he had a somewhat protracted illness?'

'I was away from my husband. I was staying here in London—on business—for some time before his death. I was not even aware that he was in any danger. When I hurried back to Passy I was too late. My husband was—was already buried.'

'It was most unfortunate. And the fact that his lordship was not on speaking terms with the members of his own family—pray understand that I am not expressing any opinion on the case—but this fact seems to render his end more unhappy.'

'He had Dr. Vimpany,' said Iris in a tone which suggested to the lawyer jealousy or dislike of the doctor.

'Well,' he said, 'it remains to prove the will and to make our claims against the

Insurance Office. I have the policy here. His lordship was insured in the Royal Unicorn Life Insurance Company for the sum of 15,000*l.* We must not expect to have this large claim satisfied quite immediately. Perhaps the office will take three months to settle. But, as I said before, your ladyship can draw upon us.'

'You are certain that the Company will pay?'

'Assuredly. Why not? They must pay.'

'Oh! I thought that perhaps so large a sum——'

'My dear Madam'—the man who administered so much real and personal property smiled—'fifteen thousand pounds is not what we call a very large sum. Why, if an Insurance Company refused to pay a lawful claim it would cut its own throat—absolutely. Its very existence depends upon its meeting

all just and lawful claims. The death being proved it remains for the Company to pay the insurance into the hands of the person entitled to receive it. That is, in this case, to me, acting for you.'

'Yes—I see—but I thought that, perhaps, my husband having died abroad there might be difficulty.'

'There might, if he had died in Central Africa. But he died in a suburb of Paris, under French law, which, in such matters, is even more careful and exacting than our own. We have the official papers, and the doctor's certificate. We have, besides, a photograph of the unfortunate gentleman lying on his death-bed—this was well thought of: it is an admirable likeness—the sun cannot lie—we have also a photograph of the newly erected tombstone. Doubt? Dear me, Madam, they could no more raise a doubt as to your husband's death than if he were buried in the

family vault. If anything should remove any ground for doubt, it is the fact that the only person who benefits by his death is yourself. If, on the other hand, he had been in the hands of persons who had reason to wish for his death, there might have been suspicions of foul play, which would have been matter for the police—but not for an Insurance Company.'

'Oh! I am glad to learn, at least, that there will be no trouble. I have no knowledge of business, and I thought that——'

'No—no—your ladyship need have no such ideas. In fact, I have already anticipated your arrival, and have sent to the manager of the Company. He certainly went so far as to express a doubt as to the cause of death. Consumption in any form was not supposed to be in your husband's family. But Lord Harry—ahem!—tried his constitution—tried his constitution, as I put it.'

He had put it a little differently. What he said was to the following effect—'Lord Harry Norland, Sir, was a devil. There was nothing he did not do. I only wonder that he has lived so long. Had I been told that he died of everything all together, I should not have been surprised. Ordinary rapid consumption was too simple for such a man.'

Iris gave the lawyer her London address, obeyed him by drawing a hundred pounds, half of which she sent to Mr. William Linville, at Louvain, and went home to wait. She must now stay in London until the claim was discharged.

She waited six weeks. At the end of that time she learned from her solicitors that the Company had settled, and that they, the lawyers, had paid to her bankers the sum of 15,000*l.* being the whole of the insurance.

Acting, then, on her husband's instructions, she sought another bank and opened an ac

count for one William Linville, gentleman, residing abroad. She gave herself as a reference, left the usual signature of William Linville, and paid to his account a cheque for 8,000*l.* She saw the manager of her own bank, explained that this large cheque was for an investment, and asked him to let her have 2,000*l.* in bank-notes. This sum, she added, was for a special purpose. The manager imagined that she was about to perform some act of charity, perhaps an expiatory work on behalf of her late husband.

She then wrote to Dr. Vimpany, who was in Paris, making an appointment with him. Her work of fraud and falsehood was complete.

'There has been no trouble at all,' she wrote to her husband; 'and there will not be any. The Insurance Company has already settled the claim. I have paid 8,000*l.* to the account of William Linville. My own banker

—who knows my father—believes that the money is an investment. My dear Harry, I believe that, unless the doctor begins to worry us—which he will do as soon as his money is all gone—a clear course lies before us. Let us, as I have already begged you to do, go straight away to some part of America, where you are certain not to be known. You can dye your hair and grow a beard to make sure. Let us go away from every place and person that may remind us of the past. Perhaps, in time, we may recover something of the old peace and—can it ever be?—the old self-respect.'

There was going to be trouble, however, and that of a kind little expected, impossible to be guarded against. And it would be trouble caused by her own act and deed.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN ADVERTISEMENT.

THE trouble was made by Iris for herself.

In this way—

She saw Fanny's advertisement. Her first impulse was to take her back into her service. But she remembered the necessity for concealment. She must not place herself —she realised already the fact that she had done a thing which would draw upon her the vengeance of the law—and her husband in the power of this woman, whose fidelity might not stand the shock of some fit of jealousy, rage, or revenge for fancied slight. She must henceforth be cut off altogether from all her old friends.

She therefore answered the letter by one which contained no address, and which she posted with her own hand at the General Post Office. She considered her words carefully. She must not say too much or too little.

'I enclose,' she said, 'a bank note for ten pounds to assist you. I am about to travel abroad, but must, under existing circumstances, dispense with the services of a maid. In the course of my travels I expect to be in Brussels. If, therefore, you have anything to tell me or to ask of me, write to me at the Poste Restante of that city, and in the course of six months or so I am tolerably sure to send for the letter. In fact, I shall expect to find a letter from you. Do not think that I have forgotten you or your faithful services, though for a moment I am not able to call you to my side. Be patient.'

There was no address given in the letter. This alone was mysterious. If Lady Harry

was in London—and the letter was posted at the General Post Office—why could she not give her address? If she was abroad, why should she hide her address? In any case, why should she do without a maid—she who had never been without a maid—to whom a maid was as necessary as one of her hands? Oh! she could never get along at all without a maid. As for Iris's business in London and her part in the conspiracy, of course Fanny neither knew nor suspected.

She had recourse again to her only friend —Mrs. Vimpany—to whom she sent Lady Harry's letter, and imploring her to lay the whole before Mr. Mountjoy.

'He is getting so much stronger,' Mrs. Vimpany wrote back, 'that I shall be able to tell him everything before long. Do not be in a hurry. Let us do nothing that may bring trouble upon her. But I am sure that something is going on—something wicked. I

have read your account of what has happened over and over again. I am as convinced as you could possibly be that my husband and Lord Harry are trading on the supposed death of the latter. We can do nothing. Let us wait.'

Three days afterwards she wrote again.

'The opportunity for which I have been waiting has come at last. Mr. Mountjoy is, I believe, fully recovered. This morning, seeing him so well and strong, I asked him if I might venture to place in his hands a paper containing a narrative.

'"Is it concerning Iris?" he asked.

'"It has to do with Lady Harry—indirectly."

'For a while he made no reply. Then he asked me if it had also to do with her husband.

'"With her husband and with mine," I told him.

'Again he was silent.

'After a bit he looked up and said, "I had promised myself never again to interfere in Lady Harry Norland's affairs. You wish me to read this document, Mrs. Vimpany?"

'"Certainly; I am most anxious that you should read it and should advise upon it."

'"Who wrote it?"

'"Fanny Mere, Lady Harry's maid."

'"If it is only to tell me that her husband is a villain," he said, "I will not read it."

'"If you were enabled by reading it to keep Lady Harry from a dreadful misfortune?" I suggested.

'"Give me the document,' he said.

'Before I gave it to him—it was in my pocket—I showed him a newspaper containing a certain announcement.

'"Lord Harry dead?" he cried. "Impossible! Then Iris is free."

'"Perhaps you will first read the document." I drew it out of my pocket, gave it to him, and retired. He should be alone while he read it.

'Half an hour afterwards I returned. I found him in a state of the most violent agitation, without, however, any of the weakness which he betrayed on previous occasions.

'"Mrs. Vimpany," he cried, "this is terrible! There is no doubt—not the least doubt—in my mind that the man Oxbye is the man buried under the name of Lord Harry, and that he was murdered—murdered in cold blood—by that worst of villains——"

'"My husband," I said.

'"Your husband—most unfortunate of wives! As for Lord Harry's share in the murder, it is equally plain that he knew of it, even if he did not consent to it. Good heavens! Do you understand? Do you realise what they have done? Your husband

and Iris's husband may be tried—actually tried—for murder and put to a shameful death. Think of it!"'

'"I do think of it, Heaven knows! I think of it every day—I think of it all day long. But, remember, I will say nothing that will bring this fate upon them. And Fanny will say nothing. Without Fanny's evidence there cannot be even a suspicion of the truth."

'"What does Iris know about it?"

'"I think that she cannot know anything of the murder. Consider the dates. On Wednesday Fanny was dismissed; on Thursday she returned secretly and witnessed the murder. It was on Thursday morning that Lady Harry drove to Victoria on her return to Passy, as we all supposed, and as I still suppose. On Saturday Fanny was back again. The cottage was deserted. She was told that the man Oxbye had got up and

walked away; that her mistress had not been at the house at all, but was travelling in Switzerland; and that Lord Harry was gone on a long journey. And she was sent into Switzerland to get her out of the way. I gather from all this that Lady Harry was taken away by her husband directly she arrived—most likely by night—and that of the murder she knew nothing."

'"No—no—she could know nothing! That, at least, they dared not tell her. But about the rest? How much does she know? How far has she lent herself to the conspiracy? Mrs. Vimpany, I shall go back to London to-night. We will travel by the night train. I feel quite strong enough."

'I began this letter in Scotland; I finish it in London.

'We are back again in town. Come to the hotel at once, and see us.'

So, there was now a man to advise. For

once, Fanny was thankful for the creation of Man. To the most misanthropic female there sometimes comes a time when she must own that man has his uses. These two women had now got a man with whom to take counsel.

'I do not ask you,' said Mr. Mountjoy, with grave face, 'how far this statement of yours is true: I can see plainly that it is true in every particular.'

'It is quite true, sir; every word of it is true. I have been tempted to make out a worse case against the doctor, but I have kept myself to the bare truth.'

'You could not make out a worse case against any man. It is the blackest case I have ever heard of or read. It is the foulest murder. I do not understand the exact presence of Lord Harry when the medicine was given. Did he see the doctor administer it? Did he say anything?'

'He turned white when the doctor told

him that the man was going to die—that day, perhaps, or next day. When the doctor was pouring out the medicine he turned pale again and trembled. While the doctor was taking the photograph he trembled again. I think, sir—I really think—that he knew all along that the man was going to die, but when it came to the moment he was afraid. If it had depended upon him, Oxbye would be alive still.'

'He was a consenting party. Well; for the moment both of you keep perfect silence. Don't discuss the thing with each other lest you should be overheard: bury the thing. I am going to make some inquiries.'

The first thing was to find out what steps had been taken, if any, with insurance companies. For Iris's sake his inquiry had to be conducted quite openly. His object must seem none other than the discovery of Lady Harry Norland's present address. When

bankers, insurance companies, and solicitors altogether have to conduct a piece of business it is not difficult to ascertain such a simple matter.

He found out the name of the family solicitor. He went to the office, sent in his card, and stated his object. As a very old friend of Lady Harry's he wanted to learn her address. He had just come up from Scotland, where he had been ill, and had only just learned her terrible bereavement.

The lawyer made no difficulty at all. There was no reason why he should. Lady Harry had been in London; she was kept in town for nearly two months by business connected with the unfortunate event; but she had now gone—she was travelling in Switzerland or elsewhere. As for her address, a letter addressed to his care should be forwarded on hearing from her ladyship.

'Her business, I take it, was the proving

of the will and the arrangement of the property.

'That was the business which kept her in town.'

'Lady Harry,' Mr. Mountjoy went on, 'had a little property of her own apart from what she may ultimately get from her father. About five thousand pounds—not more.'

'Indeed? She did not ask any assistance in respect of her own property.'

'I suppose it is invested and in the hands of trustees. But, indeed, I do not know. Lord Harry himself, I have heard, was generally in a penniless condition. Were there any insurances?'

'Yes; happily, there was insurance paid for him by the family. Otherwise there would have been nothing for the widow.'

'And this has been paid up, I suppose?'

'Yes: it has been paid into her private account.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Mountjoy. 'With your permission, I will address a letter to Lady Harry here. Will you kindly order it to be forwarded at the very earliest opportunity?'

'Iris,' he thought, 'will not come to London any more. She has been persuaded by her husband to join in the plot. Good heavens! She has become a swindler—a conspirator—a fraudulent woman! Iris!—it is incredible—it is horrible! What shall we do?'

He first wrote a letter, to the care of the lawyers. He informed her that he had made a discovery of the highest importance to herself—he refrained from anything that might give rise to suspicion; he implored her to give him an interview anywhere, in any part of the world—alone. He told her that the consequences of refusal might be fatal—absolutely fatal—to her future happiness: he conjured

her to believe that he was anxious for nothing but her happiness: that he was still, as always, her most faithful friend.

Well; he could do no more. He had not the least expectation that his letter would do any good; he did not even believe that it would reach Iris. The money was received and paid over to her own account. There was really no reason at all why she should place herself again in communication with these lawyers. What would she do, then? One thing only remained. With her guilty husband, this guilty woman must remain in concealment for the rest of their days, or until death released her of the man who was pretending to be dead. At the best, they might find some place where there would be no chance of anybody ever finding them who knew either of them before this wicked thing was done.

But could she know of the murder?

He remembered the instruction given to Fanny. She was to write to Brussels. Let her therefore write at once. He would arrange what she was to say. Under his dictation, therefore, Fanny wrote as follows:—

'My Lady,—I have received your ladyship's letter, and your kind gift of ten pounds. I note your direction to write to you at Brussels, and I obey them.

'Mr. Mountjoy, who has been ill and in Scotland, has come back to London. He begs me to tell you that he has had an interview with your lawyers and has learned that you have been in town on business, the nature of which he has also learned. He has left an important letter for you at their office. They will forward it as soon as they learn your address.

'Since I came back from Passy I have thought it prudent to set down in writing an exact account of everything that happened

there under my own observation. Mr. Mountjoy has read my story, and thinks that I ought without delay to send a copy of it to you. I therefore send you one, in which I have left out all the names, and put in A, B, and C instead, by his directions. He says that you will have no difficulty in filling up the names.

'I remain, my dear Lady,

'Your ladyship's most obedient
and humble servant,
'FANNY MERE.'

This letter, with the document, was dispatched to Brussels that night. And this is the trouble which Iris brought upon herself by answering Fanny's advertisement.

CHAPTER LX

ON THE EVE OF A CHANGE

IRIS returned to Louvain by way of Paris. She had to settle up with the doctor.

He obeyed her summons and called upon her at her hotel.

'Well, my lady,' he began in his gross voice, rubbing his hands and laughing, 'it has come off, after all; hasn't it?'

'I do not desire, Dr. Vimpany, to discuss anything with you. We will proceed to settle what business we have together.'

'To think that your ladyship should actually fall in!' he replied. 'Now I confess that this was to me the really difficult part of

the job. It is quite easy to pretend that a man is dead, but not so easy to touch his money. I really do not see how we could have managed at all without your co-operation. Well, you've had no difficulty, of course?'

'None at all.'

'I am to have half.'

'I am instructed to give you two thousand pounds. I have the money here for you.'

'I hope you consider that I deserve this share?'

'I think, Dr. Vimpany, that whatever you get in the future or the present you will richly deserve. You have dragged a man down to your own level——'

'And a woman too.'

'A woman too. Your reward will come, I doubt not.'

'If it always takes the form of bank-notes I care not how great the reward may be.

You will doubtless, as a good Christian, expect your own reward—for him and for you?'

'I have mine already,' she replied sadly. 'Now, Dr. Vimpany, let me pay you and get rid of your company.'

He counted the money carefully and put it in the banker's bag in his coat-pocket. 'Thank you, my lady. We have exchanged compliments enough over this job.'

'I hope—I pray—that we may never set eyes on you again.'

'I cannot say. People run up against each other in the strangest manner, especially people who've done shady things and have got to keep in the background.'

'Enough!—enough!'

'The background of the world is a very odd place, I assure you. It is full of interesting people. The society has a piquancy which you will find, I hope quite charming.

You will be known by another name of course?'

'I shall not tell you by what name——'

'Tut—tut! I shall soon find out. The background gets narrower when you fall into misery.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, Lady Harry, that your husband has no idea whatever as to the value of money. The two thousand that you are taking him will vanish in a year or two. What will you do then? As for myself, I know the value of money so well that I am always buying the most precious and delightful things with it. I enjoy them immensely. Never any man enjoyed good things so much as I do. But the delightful things cost money. Let us be under no illusions. Your ladyship and your noble husband and I all belong to the background; and in a year or two we shall belong to the needy background. I

daresay that very soon after that the world will learn that we all belong to the criminal background. I wish your ladyship a joyful reunion with your husband!'

He withdrew, and Iris set eyes on him no more. But the prophecy with which he departed remained with her, and it was with a heart foreboding fresh sorrows that she left Paris and started for Louvain.

Here began the new life—that of concealment and false pretence. Iris put off her weeds, but she never ventured abroad without a thick veil. Her husband, discovering that English visitors sometimes ran over from Brussels to see the Hôtel de Ville, never ventured out at all till evening. They had no friends and no society of any kind.

The house, which stood secluded behind a high wall in its garden, was in the quietest part of this quiet old city; no sound of life

and work reached it; the pair who lived there seldom spoke to each other. Except at the midday breakfast and the dinner they did not meet. Iris sat in her own room, silent; Lord Harry sat in his, or paced the garden walks for hours.

Thus the days went on monotonously. The clock ticked; the hours struck; they took meals; they slept; they rose and dressed; they took meals again—this was all their life. This was all that they could expect for the future.

The weeks went on. For three months Iris endured this life. No news came to her from the outer world; her husband had even forgotten the first necessary of modern life—the newspaper. It was not the ideal life of love, apart from the world, where the two make for themselves a Garden of Eden; it was a prison, in which two were confined to-

gether who were kept apart by their guilty secret.

They ceased altogether to speak; their very meals were taken in silence. The husband saw continual reproach in his wife's eyes; her sad and heavy look spoke more plainly than any words 'It is to this that you have brought me.'

One morning Iris was idly turning over the papers in her desk. There were old letters, old photographs, all kinds of trifling treasures that reminded her of the past—a woman keeps everything; the little mementoes of her childhood, her first governess, her first school, her school friendships—everything. As Iris turned over these things her mind wandered back to the old days. She became again a young girl—innocent, fancy free; she grew up—she was a woman innocent still. Then her mind jumped at one leap to the present, and she saw herself as she was

—innocent no longer, degraded and guilty, the vile accomplice of a vile conspiracy.

Then as one who has been wearing coloured glasses puts them off and sees things in their own true colours, she saw how she had been pulled down by a blind infatuation to the level of the man who had held her in his fascination ; she saw him as he was—reckless, unstable, careless of name and honour. Then for the first time she realised the depths into which she was plunged and the life she was henceforth doomed to lead. The blind love fell from her—it was dead at last ; but it left her bound to the man by a chain which nothing could break ; she was in her right senses ; she saw things as they were ; but the knowledge came too late.

Her husband made no attempt to bridge over the estrangement which had thus grown up between them ; it became wider every day ; he lived apart and alone ; he sat in his

own room, smoking more cigars, drinking more brandy-and-water than was good for him; sometimes he paced the gravel walks in the garden; in the evening after dinner, he went out and walked about the empty streets of the quiet city. Once or twice he ventured into a café, sitting in a corner, his hat drawn over his eyes; but that was dangerous. For the most part he kept in the streets, and he spoke to no one.

Meantime the autumn had given place to winter, which began in wet and dreary fashion. Day and night the rain fell, making the gravel walks too wet and the streets impossible. Then Lord Harry sat in his room and smoked all day long. And still the melancholy of the one increased, and the boredom of the other.

He spoke at last. It was after breakfast.

'Iris,' he said, 'how long is this to continue?'

'This—what?'

'This life—this miserable solitude and silence.'

'Till we die,' she replied. 'What else do you expect? You have sold our freedom, and we must pay the price.'

'No; it shall end. I will end it. I can endure it no longer.'

'You are still young. You will perhaps have forty years more to live—all like this—as dull and empty. It is the price we must pay.'

'No,' he repeated, 'it shall end. I swear that I will go on like this no longer.'

'You had better go to London and walk in Piccadilly to get a little society.'

'What do you care what I do or where I go?'

'We will not reproach each other, Harry.'

'Why—what else do you do all day long

but reproach me with your gloomy looks and your silence?'

'Well—end it if you can. Find some change in the life.'

'Be gracious for a little, and listen to my plan. I have made a plan. Listen, Iris. I can no longer endure this life. It drives me mad.'

'And me too. That is one reason why we should not desire to change it. Mad people forget. They think they are somewhere else. For us to believe that we were somewhere else would be in itself happiness.'

'I am resolved to change it—to change it, I say—at any risk. We will leave Louvain.'

'We can, I daresay,' Iris replied coldly, 'find another town, French or Belgian, where we can get another cottage, behind high walls in a garden, and hide there.'

'No. I will hide no longer. I am sick of hiding.'

'Go on. What is your plan? Am I to pretend to be someone else's widow?'

'We will go to America. There are heaps of places in the States where no English people ever go—neither tourists nor settlers—places where they have certainly never heard of us. We will find some quiet village, buy a small farm, and settle among the people. I know something about farming. We need not trouble to make the thing pay. And we will go back to mankind again. Perhaps, Iris—when we have gone back to the world—you will'—he hesitated—'you will be able to forgive me, and to regard me again with your old thoughts. It was done for your sake.'

'It was not done for my sake. Do not repeat that falsehood. The old thoughts will never come back, Harry. They are dead and gone. I have ceased to respect you or myself. Love cannot survive the loss of self-respect.

Who am I that I should give love to anybody? Who are you that you should expect love?'

'Will you go with me to America—love or no love? I cannot stay here—I will not stay here.'

'I will go with you wherever you please. I should like not to run risks. There are still people whom it would pain to see Iris Henley tried and found guilty with two others on a charge of fraudulent conspiracy.'

'I wouldn't accustom myself, if I were you, Iris, to speak of things too plainly. Leave the thing to me and I will arrange it. See now, we will travel by a night train from Brussels to Calais. We will take the cross-country line from Amiens to Havre; there we will take boat for New York—no English people ever travel by the Havre line. Once in America we will push up country—to Kentucky or somewhere—and find that quiet country place: after that I ask no more. I

will settle down for the rest of my life, and have no more adventures. Do you agree, Iris?'

'I will do anything that you wish,' she replied coldly.

'Very well. Let us lose no time. I feel choked here. Will you go into Brussels and buy a Continental Bradshaw or a Baedeker, or something that will tell us the times of sailing, the cost of passage, and all the rest of it? We will take with us money to start us with; you will have to write to your bankers. We can easily arrange to have the money sent to New York, and it can be invested there—except your own fortune—in my new name. We shall want no outfit for a fortnight at sea. I have arranged it all beautifully. Child, look like your old self.' He took an unresisting hand. 'I want to see you smile and look happy again.'

'You never will.'

'Yes—when we have got ourselves out of this damnable, unwholesome way of life; when we are with our fellow-creatures again. You will forget this—this little business—which was, you know, after all, an unhappy necessity.'

'Oh! how can I ever forget?'

'New interests will arise; new friendships will be formed——'

'Harry, it is myself that I cannot forgive. Teach me to forgive myself, and I will forget everything.'

He pressed her no longer.

'Well, then,' he said, 'go to Brussels and get this information. If you will not try to conquer this absurd moral sensitiveness—which comes too late—you will at least enable me to place you in a healthier atmosphere.'

'I will go at once,' she said. 'I will go by the next train.'

'There is a train at a quarter to two. You can do all you have to do and catch the train at five. Iris'—the chance of a change made him impatient—'let us go to-morrow. Let us go by the night express. There will be English travellers, but they shall not recognise me. We shall be in Calais at one in the morning. We will go on by an early train before the English steamer comes in. Will you be ready?'

'Yes; there is nothing to delay me. I suppose we can leave the house by paying the rent? I will go and do what you want.'

'Let us go this very night.'

'If you please; I am always ready.'

'No; there will be no time; it will look like running away. We will go to-morrow night. Besides you would be too tired after going to Brussels and back. Iris, we are going to be happy again—I am sure we are.' He, for one, looked as if there was nothing to

prevent a return of happiness. He laughed and waved his hands. 'A new sky—new scenes—new work—you will be happy again, Iris. You shall go, dear. Get me the things I want.'

She put on her thick veil and started on her short journey. The husband's sudden return to his former good spirits gave her a gleam of hope. The change would be welcome indeed if it permitted him to go about among other men, and to her if it gave her occupation. As to forgetting—how could she forget the past, so long as they were reaping the fruit of their wickedness in the shape of solid dividends? She easily found what she wanted. The steamer of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique left Havre every eighth day. They would go by that line. The more she considered the plan the more it commended itself. They would at any rate go out of prison. There would be a change

in their life. Miserable condition! To have no other choice of life but that of banishment and concealment: no other prospect than that of continual fraud renewed by every post that brought them money.

When she had got all the information that was wanted she had still an hour or two before her. She thought she would spend the time wandering about the streets of Brussels. The animation and life of the cheerful city—where all the people except the market-women are young—pleased her. It was long since she had seen any of the cheerfulness that belongs to a busy street. She walked slowly along, up one street and down another, looking into the shops. She made two or three little purchases. She looked into a place filled with Tauchnitz Editions and bought two or three books. She was beginning to think that she was tired and had better make her way back to the station, when suddenly she remembered

the post office and her instructions to Fanny Mere.

'I wonder,' she said, 'if Fanny has written to me.'

She asked the way to the post-office. There was time if she walked quickly.

At the poste restante there was a letter for her—more than a letter, a parcel, apparently a book.

She received it and hurried back to the station.

In the train she amused herself with looking through the leaves of her new books. Fanny Mere's letter she would read after dinner.

At dinner they actually talked. Lord Harry was excited with the prospect of going back to the world. He had enjoyed his hermitage, he said, quite long enough. Give him the society of his fellow-creatures. 'Put me among cannibals,' he said, 'and I should

make friends with them. But to live alone—it is the devil! To-morrow we begin our new flight.'

After dinner he lit his cigar, and went on chattering about the future. Iris remembered the packet she had got at the post-office, and opened it. It contained a small manuscript book filled with writing and a brief letter. She read the letter, laid it down, and opened the book.

CHAPTER LXI

THE LAST DISCOVERY

'I SHALL like to turn farmer,' Lord Harry went on talking while Iris opened and began to read Fanny's manuscript. 'After all my adventures, to settle down in a quiet place and cultivate the soil. On market-day we will drive into town together'—he talked as if Kentucky were Warwickshire—' side by side in a spring cart. I shall have samples of grain in bags, and you will have a basket of butter and cream. It will be an ideal life. We shall dine at the ordinary, and, after dinner, over a pipe and a glass of grog I shall discuss the weather and the crops. And while we live in this retreat

of ours, over here the very name of Harry Norland will have been forgotten. Queer, that! We shall go on living long after we are dead and buried and forgotten. In the novels the man turns up after he is supposed to be cast away—wrecked—drowned—dead long ago. But he never turns up when he is forgotten—unless he is Rip Van Winkle. By gad, Iris! when we are old people we will go home and see the old places together. It will be something to look forward to—something to live for—eh?

'I feel quite happy this evening, Iris; happier than I have been for months. The fact is, this infernal place has hipped us both confoundedly. I didn't like to grumble, but I've felt the monotony more than a bit. And so have you. It's made you brood over things. Now, for my part, I like to look at the bright side. Here we are comfortably cut off from the past. That's all done with.

Nothing in the world can revive the memory of disagreeable things if we are only true to ourselves and agree to forget them. What has been done can never be discovered. Not a soul knows except the doctor, and between him and ourselves we are going to put a few thousand—— What's the matter, Iris? What the devil is the matter?'

For Iris, who had been steadily reading while her husband chattered on, suddenly dropped the book, and turned upon him a white face and eyes struck with horror.

'What is it?' Lord Harry repeated.

'Oh! Is this true?'

'What?'

'I cannot say it. Oh, my God! can this be true?'

'What? Speak, Iris.' He sprang to his feet. 'Is it—is it discovered?'

'Discovered? Yes, all—all—all is discovered!'

'Where? How? Give me the thing, Iris. Quick! Who knows? What is known?'

He snatched the book from her hands. She shrank from his touch, and pushed back her chair, standing in an attitude of self-defence—watching him as one would watch a dangerous creature.

He swiftly read page after page, eager to know the worst. Then he threw the book upon the table.

'Well?' he said, not lifting his eyes.

'The man was murdered—murdered!' she whispered.

He made no reply.

'You looked on while he was murdered! You looked on consenting! You are a murderer!'

'I had no share or part in it. I did not know he was being poisoned.'

'You knew it when I was with you. Oh!

the dead man—the murdered man—was in the house at the very moment! Your hands were red with blood when you took me away—to get me out of the way so that I should not know——' She stopped, she could not go on.

'I did not know, Iris—not with certainty. I thought he was dying when he came into the house. He did not die; he began to recover. When the doctor gave him his medicine—after that woman went away—I suspected. When he died, my suspicions were stronger. I challenged him. He did not deny it. Believe me, Iris, I neither counselled it nor knew of it.'

'You acquiesced in it. You consented. You should have warned the—the other murderer that you would denounce him if the man died. You took advantage of it. His death enabled you to carry out your fraud with me as your accomplice. With ME! I am an accomplice in a murder!'

'No, no, Iris; you knew nothing of it. No one can ever accuse you——'

'You do not understand. It is part of the accusation which I make against myself.'

'As for what this woman writes,' her husband went on, 'it is true. I suppose it is useless to deny a single word of it. She was hidden behind the curtain, then! She heard and saw all! If Vimpany had found her! He was right. No one so dangerous as a woman. Yes; she has told you exactly what happened. She suspected all along. We should have sent her away and changed our plans. This comes of being too clever. Nothing would do for the doctor but the man's death. I hoped—we both hoped—that he would die a natural death. He did not. Without a dead man we were powerless. We had to get a dead man. Iris, I will hide nothing more from you, whatever happens. I confess everything.

I knew that he was going to die. When he began to get well I was filled with forebodings, because I knew that he would never be allowed to go away. How else could we find a dead body? You can't steal a body; you can't make one up. You must have one for proof of death. I say'—his voice was harsh and hoarse—'I say that I knew he must die. I saw his death in the doctor's face. And there was no more money left for a new experiment if Oxbye should get well and go away. When it came to the point I was seized with mortal terror. I would have given up everything—everything—to see the man get up from his bed and go away. But it was too late. I saw the doctor prepare the final dose, and when he had it to his lips I saw by his eyes that it was the drink of death. I have told you all,' he concluded.

'You have told me all,' she repeated. 'All! Good Heavens! All!'

'I have hidden nothing from you. Now there is nothing more to tell.'

She stood perfectly still — her hands clasped, her eyes set, her face white and stern.

'What I have to do now,' she said, 'lies plain before me.'

'Iris! I implore you, make no change in our plans. Let us go away as we proposed. Let the past be forgotten. Come with me——'

'Go with you? With you? With you? Oh!' She shuddered.

'Iris! I have told you all. Let us go on as if you had heard nothing. We cannot be more separated than we have been for the last three months. Let us remain as we are until the time when you will be able to feel for me—to pity my weakness—and to forgive me.'

'You do not understand. Forgive you? It is no longer a question of forgiveness.

Who am I that my forgiveness should be of the least value to you—or to any?'

'What is the question, then?'

'I don't know. A horrible crime has been committed — a horrible — ghastly, dreadful crime—such a thing as one reads of in the papers and wonders, reading it, what manner of wild beasts must be those who do such things. Perhaps one wonders, besides, what manner of women must be those who associate with those wild beasts. My husband is one of those wild beasts!—my husband!—my husband!—and I—I am one of the women who are the fit companions of these wild creatures!'

'You can say what you please, Iris; what you please.'

'I have known—only since I came here have I really known and understood—that I have wrecked my life in a blind passion. I have loved you, Harry: it has been my curse.

I followed you against the warnings of everybody: I have been rewarded—by this. We are in hiding. If we are found we shall be sent to a convict prison for conspiracy. We shall be lucky if we are not tried for murder and hanged by the neck until we are dead. This is my reward!'

'I have never played the hypocrite with you, Iris. I have never pretended to virtues which I do not possess. So far——'

'Hush! Do not speak to me. I have something more to say, and then I shall never speak to you any more. Hush! Let me collect my thoughts. I cannot find the words. I cannot. . . . Wait—Wait! Oh!' She sat down and burst into sobbings and moanings. But only for a minute. Then she sprang to her feet again and dashed back the tears. 'Time for crying,' she said, 'when all is done. Harry, listen carefully; these are my last words. You will never hear from me any

more. You must manage your own life in your own way, to save it or to spoil it; I will never more bear any part in it. I am going back to England—alone. I shall give up your name, and I shall take my maiden name again—or some other. I shall live somewhere quietly where you will not discover me. But perhaps you will not look for me?'

'I will not,' he said. 'I owe you so much. I will not look for you.'

'As regards this money which I have obtained for you under false pretences, out of the fifteen thousand pounds for which you were insured, five thousand have been paid to my private account. I shall restore to the Company all that money.'

'Good Heavens! Iris, you will be prosecuted on a criminal charge.'

'Shall I? That will matter little, provided I make reparation. Alas! who shall make reparation—who shall atone—for the

blood-spilling? For all things else in this world we may make what we call atonement; but not for the spilling of blood.'

'You mean this? You will deliberately do this?'

'I mean every word. I will do nothing and say nothing that will betray you. But the money that I can restore, I will restore—So HELP ME, GOD!' With streaming eyes she raised her hand and pointed upwards.

Her husband bowed his head.

'You have said all you wished to say?' he asked humbly.

'I have said all.'

'Let me look in your face once more—so—full—with the light upon it. Yes; I have loved you, Iris—I have always loved you. Better, far better, for you had you fallen dead at my feet on the day when you became my wife. Then I should have been spared—I should have been spared a great deal. You

are right, Iris. Your duty lies plainly before you. As for me, I must think of mine. Farewell! The lips of a murderer are not fit to touch even the hem of your garments. Farewell!'

He left her. She heard the hall door open and shut. She would see her husband no more.

She went to her own room and packed a single box with necessary things. Then she called the housemaid and informed her that she had been summoned to return suddenly to England; she must reach Brussels at least that evening. The woman brought a porter who carried her box to the station; and Iris left Louvain—and her husband—for ever.

CHAPTER LXII

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

AT a Board meeting of the Royal Unicorn Life Insurance Company, specially convened, the Chairman had to make a communication of a very remarkable character.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I call upon the Secretary, without further introduction, to read a letter, to consider which you are called together this day.'

'The letter,' the Secretary began, 'is simply headed "Paris," dated two days ago.'

'Only two days ago,' said the Chairman, mysteriously. 'But, of course, that means

nothing. There has been plenty of time for him to change his residence. I dare say he may be in London at our very elbow. Go on, if you please.'

'Gentlemen'—the Secretary proceeded to read the letter. 'It is now three months since a claim was sent in to you by the firm of Erskine, Mansfield, Denham and Co., solicitors of Lincoln's Inn Fields, for the sum of 15,000*l.* due to the heirs of Lord Harry Norland in respect of an insurance effected upon his life.'

'The claim, gentlemen,' said the Chairman, 'was duly acknowledged and paid some weeks later. It was a heavy loss; but these things will occur, and there seemed no reason to doubt the facts alleged, or to dispute the claim.'

'I write this letter,' the Secretary continued reading, 'in order to inform you that the claim was fraudulent, inasmuch as Lord

Harry Norland was at the time, and is still, actually living.'

Fraudulent! The man still living! At this point there was a sudden awakening. Everybody sat up and listened with all their ears.

'I may tell you, gentlemen,' the Chairman explained, 'that the writer of this remarkable letter is none other than Lord Harry Norland himself. We will now proceed without further interruption.'

'In conjunction with another person, I devised and carried out successfully a plan by which I was enabled to touch at once, and without the disagreeable necessity of previously expiring and being buried, the whole of the money for which I was insured. Other people have attempted the same design, I believe, but the thing has hitherto been managed clumsily. In my own case, it has been managed with great dexterity and artistic

skill. As you will naturally be curious on a subject which interests you so closely, I have no objection to reveal the method. It is not enough to write to your office and state that a certain person is dead. One must be prepared with proofs of the death should any doubt arise. No proof of death is quite satisfactory without evidence as to the disposal of the dead body. With that object, we procured from the Hôtel Dieu a patient apparently in an advanced state of consumption. My accomplice, being a medical man, highly recommended, was able to do this without suspicion. We nursed him ostentatiously. During the latter part of the illness he was nursed under the name of Lord Harry Norland. He died. His name was entered in the official register as Lord Harry Norland. He was buried in the cemetery at Auteuil, near Paris, as Lord Harry Norland. A headstone marks his grave, which is purchased in

perpetuity. The doctor certified the cause of his death, and communicated the fact to the deceased's brother, Lord Malven, and to the deceased's solicitors. The death was also announced to the papers. The difficulties attendant on the successful conduct of the business are so great that you need not fear a repetition. Nobody, in order to assist a fraud, will consent to die and lend his own body. It is seldom, indeed, that a sick man can be found—a foreigner and friendless—whose death will cause no curiosity and raise no questions. Add to this, it is extremely difficult, as I have now experienced, to find the necessary assistance without encountering the objections of conscience.'

'Upon my word!' cried one of the Directors, 'this is a most wonderful letter. I beg your pardon. Pray go on.'

'We began very well. We buried our man under the name of Lord Harry Norland,

as I have said. The difficulty then arose as to the presentation of the claim. It was most desirable that the claim should be made by the person who would most naturally be the deceased's heir, and after proving his will and by his own solicitor.

'I am married. I have no children. I have not lived on good terms with my family. It was therefore quite reasonable to expect that I should leave my wife sole heir and executrix. It was also natural that she should go to my solicitors—the family solicitors—and ask them to manage her affairs.

'With this object I confessed to my wife as much of the conspiracy as was necessary. Like many women, she possesses, in addition to every virtue, a blessed devotion to her husband. Where he is concerned she is easily led even from the paths of honour. I practised on that devotion; I used all the arguments and persuasions based on that devotion

necessary to convert a woman of honour into the accomplice of a conspiracy. In brief, I made my wife join in the fraud. She consented to act for me, persuaded that if she did not the conspiracy would be discovered. The business has, therefore, been carried through with the greatest success. You have paid the claim in full without question. For me there was left the very comfortable provision of 15,000*l.*, with the consciousness of a daring and successful swindle. Unfortunately, my wife has now discovered that her conscience will give her no peace or rest until full restitution of the money has been made. She has informed me of her intention to send back without delay that part of it which lies at her bank in her own name—that is to say, five thousand pounds.

'I do not suppose that, as gentlemen, you would be disposed to subject a woman who thus desires to repair a wrong to the degra-

dation of a public prosecution. No useful end, in fact, will be served in so doing. It is, in fact, in the conviction that you will take no proceedings that I write this letter.

'Further, as I wish my wife's scruples of conscience to be completely set at rest, I am prepared, on an assurance that the matter will be allowed to drop, to forward to you the remainder of the money, less two thousand pounds, which I have reason to believe will be sent to you in course of time. I am also prepared to instruct my wife, as my heir, in the event of my death to make no claim on the Company; and I have requested my solicitor to cease paying the annual premium. The Company will, therefore, be the gainers of the whole premiums which have been paid —namely, 300*l.* a year for ten years: that is to say, 3,000*l.*

'As for myself, I will take the necessary steps as soon as you have given me that letter

of assurance. As regards the other principal in the conspiracy, it is hardly worth your while to search after him. I shall be obliged if you will be so good as to acknowledge this letter without delay, with any assurance which you may be able to make as regards the person whom I have dragged into the affair. I send you an address where a letter will find me. You may wish to watch the house. I assure you beforehand that it is useless. I shall not go there.

'I remain, gentlemen,

'Your obedient servant,

'HARRY NORLAND.'

'Perhaps,' said the Secretary, 'it is in connection with this letter that I have this day received a packet of bank-notes amounting in all to the sum of five thousand pounds. The packet is endorsed "Restitution money."'

'Bank-notes, gentlemen,' said the Chairman significantly, 'may be traced if necessary.'

The Directors looked at each other. This was, indeed, a very remarkable story, and one never before brought to the notice of any Board.

'Gentlemen,' said the Chairman, 'you have heard the letter; you now have the case before you. I should like to hear your views.'

'We are likely to get most of our money back,' said one of the Directors, 'it seems to me, by holding our tongues. That is the main thing.'

'If we could get Lord Harry himself,' said another, 'I should say: Go for him, but not for his wife. I wonder we ever took his life at all. If all stories are true about him he is as bad as they make 'em. He ran away when he was a boy, and went to sea: he was a strolling actor after that: he went out to

the States and was reported to have been seen in the West: he has been a ship's steward: he has been on the turf. What has he not been?'

'We have got the money,' said another; 'that is the great thing. We must remember that we should never have found out the thing unless——'

'The Company must not compound a felony,' said the Chairman.

'Certainly not. By no means. At the same time, would any good purpose be served by public scandal in connection with a noble House?'

'The noble House,' said another Director, who was a Radical, 'may very well take care of itself. Question is, would it do any good to anybody if we ran in the wife?'

'Who is she?'

'You would expect a ruffian like Lord Harry to marry a woman like himself. Not

at all. He married a most charming creature named Henley—Iris Henley—father very well known in the City. I heard of it at the time. She would have him—infatuated about him—sad business. Mr. Chairman, I submit that it is quite impossible for us to take proceedings against this unfortunate lady, who is doing her utmost to make restitution.'

'The Company must not compound a felony,' the Chairman repeated.

'Even if we do not get back that two thousand pounds,' said the Secretary, 'the Company will lose nothing. The surrender value must be considered.'

Then another of the Directors spoke. 'We do not know where this lady is to be found. She is probably passing under another name. It is not our business to hunt her down.'

'And if we found her we should have to

prove the case, and her guilty knowledge of the conspiracy,' said another. 'How would this precious letter be taken as evidence? Why, we do not even know that it is true. We might exhume the body: what would that prove, after three months? We might open up the case, and spend a heap of money, and create a great scandal, and be none the better for it afterwards. My advice is, let the thing drop.'

'Well, but,' objected another, 'suppose we admit that the man is still living. He may die, and then there would be another claim upon us.'

'Of that,' said the Chairman, 'I think there need be no apprehension whatever. You have heard his letter. But, I repeat, we must not compound a felony!'

'I submit, Mr. Chairman,' said one who had not spoken—and he was a barrister—'that the Company knows nothing at all about

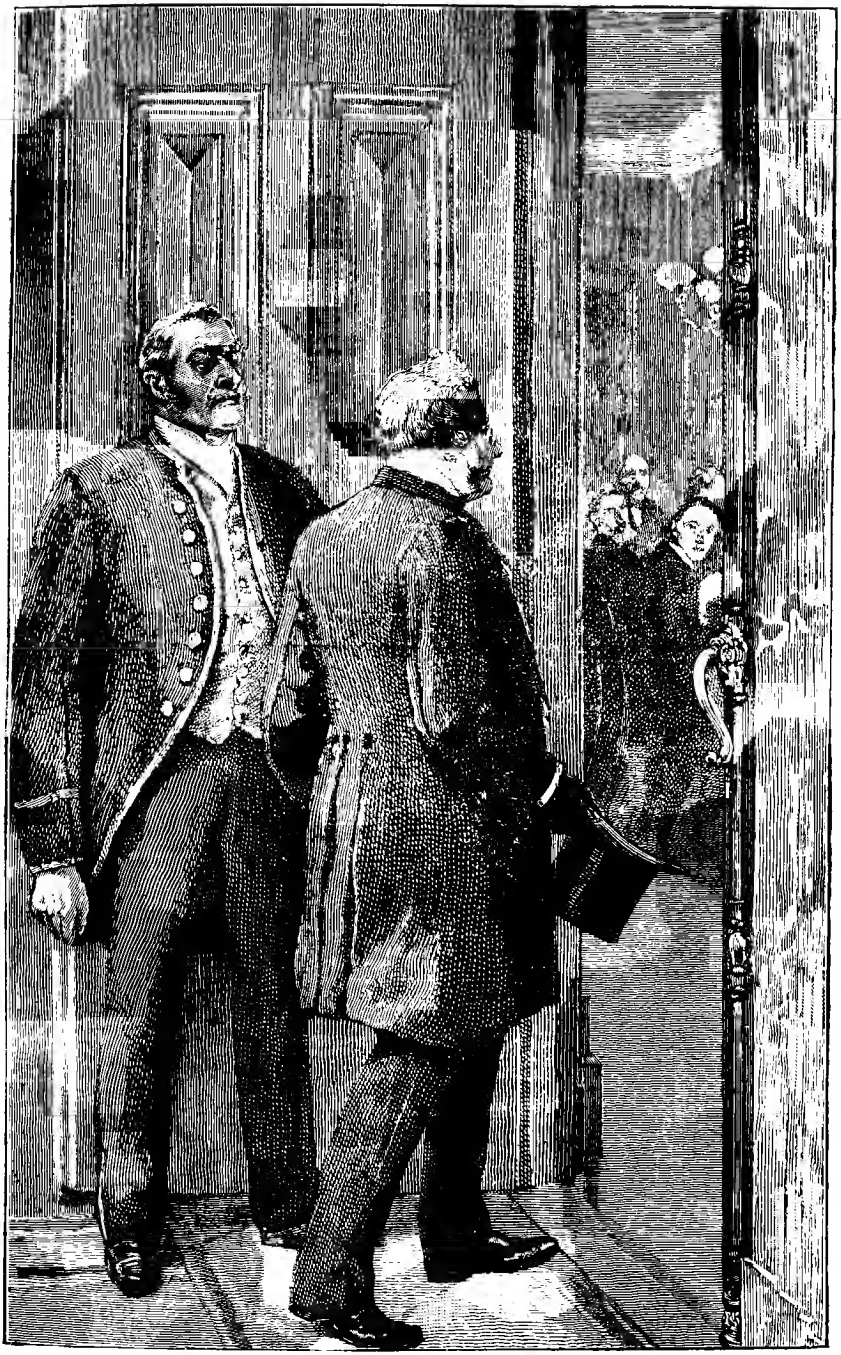
Lady Harry Norland. We have had to deal with the firm of Erskine, Mansfield, Denham and Co., of Lincoln's Inn Fields: and a most respectable firm too. On their representations we paid the money. If it can be ascertained that we have been defrauded we must look to them. If we have to prosecute anybody it must be that respectable firm.'

'Good,' said the Chairman.

'I propose, therefore, that the Secretary write to Lord Harry Norland informing him that the Company have had nothing at all to do with his wife, and do not recognise her action in any way. We shall then see what happens, and can proceed in accordance.'

At this moment a card was brought in. It was that of Mr. Erskine himself, senior partner in the very firm.

He came in, old, eminently respectable, but shaken. He was greatly shaken. 'Gentlemen,' he said nervously, 'I hasten to bring



He came in, old, eminently respectable, but shaken.

you a communication, a most extraordinary communication, which I have just received. It is nothing less than a confession—a full confession—from a person whom I had every reason to believe was dead. It is from Lord Harry Norland.'

'We know already,' said the Chairman, superior, 'the main facts which you are going to lay before us. We are met to-day in order to discuss our action in view of these facts. There has been a conspiracy of a very artful and ingenious character. It has been successful so far through the action of a woman. By the action of the same woman it is sought to make restitution. The hand of justice, however——'

'Perhaps,' said the lawyer, 'you will oblige me by allowing me to read the letter.'

'Pray read it'—the Chairman bowed—'though I do not suppose it will add to the information we already possess.'

'Gentlemen'—the lawyer read—'You will be surprised and pained to learn that I am not—as you were given to understand—dead; but, on the other hand, living and in the enjoyment of rude health. I see no reason why my life should not be prolonged to threescore years and ten.

'The claim, therefore, which you sent in to the Royal Unicorn Life Insurance Company was fraudulent. It was the result of a deep-laid conspiracy. You have been made the innocent accomplices of a great crime.

'My wife, who now knows the whole truth, is most anxious for restitution to be made. She is about to restore that portion of the money which lies in her name. Most of the rest will be sent back by myself, on certain conditions.

'In communicating the fact of my being still alive to the head of my family, you will

please also to inform him that I authorise the discontinuance of the premium. This will save the family 300*l.* a year. This will be a solatium to him for the fact that his brother still lives to disgrace the name. If I should die before the next premium is due I order my heirs not to claim the money.—I remain, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,

'HARRY NORLAND.'

'The premium which should have been paid under ordinary circumstances,' said the Secretary, 'was due six weeks ago. The policy has therefore expired.'

'It is a characteristic letter,' said the lawyer. 'Lord Harry was born to be a trouble to his family. There has never been a time, so far as I remember, when he was not a trouble and a disgrace. Hitherto, however, he has avoided actual crime—at least, actual detection. Now, I suppose, the game is up.

Yet, gentlemen, the letter is not that of an utter villain.'

'He will not be caught,' observed the Chairman. 'The letter is from too cool a hand. He has prepared a retreat. I dare say by this time he is in some safe and convenient disguise. We are only concerned—are we not?—for the moment with the lady. She has received the money from you. We paid it to you on your representations.'

'Observe,' said the lawyer, 'that the moment she learns the truth she hastens to make restitution.'

'Humph!' said the Director, turning over Lord Harry's letter so that the lawyer should not be able to read the contents. 'Have you seen her?'

'I have not. I expect to do so before long. She will certainly call upon me.'

'She will be ill-advised,' said the Chairman, 'if she calls upon anybody just at

present. Well, sir, I confess that I should be sorry—every member of this Board would be sorry—to see that lady placed in the dock beside her husband.'

'In the interests of the noble family concerned, I hope that neither of them will be placed in the dock.'

'Do you know who is the other man—the second principal?'

'I can guess. I do not know, however, where he is. All I know is what I have communicated to you—the contents of this letter.'

'One would like to get hold of the other man,' said the Chairman. 'Presumably he does not belong to a noble family. Well, sir, I don't know what may be done; but this Company cannot, I repeat, compound a felony.'

'Certainly not. Most certainly not. At present, however, you have got very little to

go upon. And unless evidence is forthcoming——'

'We will not discuss that part of the business,' said the Chairman. 'A conspiracy has been undoubtedly entered into. We may be compelled to bring an action of some kind against your firm, Mr. Erskine. As regards the lady, if she is guilty——'

'No—no,' said the lawyer, 'upon my life! Sinned against—not guilty.'

The Chairman folded up Lord Harry's letter and gave it to the Secretary.

'We are much obliged to you, sir, for your prompt action. It is, of course, only what we should have expected of your firm. Meantime, remember that the claim was made by you, that you received the money, and—but we will communicate with you in a few days.'

The Secretary wrote such a letter as was suggested. By return of post a cheque was

sent, signed by one William Linville, for the sum of eight thousand pounds. The Company had, therefore, recovered thirteen out of fifteen thousand pounds. The Secretary had another interview with Mr. Erskine, the result of which was that the Company recovered the remaining two thousand pounds.

Every firm of solicitors contains its own secrets and keeps them. Therefore, we need not inquire whether it was intended that this money should be paid by the firm or by the noble family to which Lord Harry Norland belonged. It is, however, certain that a few days afterwards Mr. Hugh Mountjoy called at the office and had a long conversation with the senior partner, and that he left behind him a very big cheque.

The subject has never been brought before the Directors again. It was, indeed, privately discussed, and that frequently. Perhaps the story was whispered about outside the Board-

room. These things do get about. There has been, however, a feeling that the thing, which would have been perfectly successful but for the conscience of a woman concerned, might be repeated with less tender consciences, and so the Companies be defrauded. Now the wickedness of the world is already so great that it needs no more teaching to make it worse. On the whole, the less said the better.

Besides, the tragic event which happened a day or two later effectively prevented any further step. That in itself was sufficient to wipe out the whole business.

CHAPTER LXIII

A REFUGE

IT was all over. Iris had sent in her money. She was in a small lodging found for her by Fanny Mere, who called her cousin. She stayed indoors all day long, afraid of stirring abroad; afraid to read the papers; afraid that her husband was arrested on the charge of conspiracy and fraud; afraid that some kind of hue and cry might be out after her.

Therefore, when she heard a manly step on the stair, she started and turned pale, expecting nothing short of an armed messenger of the law. She never was in this danger for a single minute, but conscience made a coward of her.

The step was that of Hugh Mountjoy.

'I found you out,' he said, 'by means of Fanny. The girl knew that she was safe in etting me know your secret. Why are you in concealment?'

'You cannot know all, or you would not ask me that.'

'I do know all; and again I ask, why are you in concealment?'

'Because—— Oh, Hugh—spare me!'

'I know all, which is the reason why I cannot choose but come to see you. Come out of this poor place; resume your own name. There is no reason why you should not. You were not present at Passy when this conspiracy was hatched; you got there after the funeral. You, naturally, went to see the family solicitors. Iris, what has the conspiracy to do with you?' It will be observed that Hugh had not read the letter written to the Directors of the Company.

'Do you know about the money?'

'Certainly. You sent back all that you could—five thousand pounds. That showed your own innocence——'

'Hugh, you know that I am guilty.'

'The world will think that you are innocent. At any rate, you can come out and go about without fear. Tell me, what are your plans?'

'I have no plans. I only want to hide my head—somewhere.'

'Yes; we will talk about that presently. Meantime, I have some news for you.'

'News? What news?'

'Really good news. I have to tell you a thing which will surprise you.'

'Good news? What good news is there for me?'

'Your husband has sent back the whole of the money.'

'Sent back? To the Insurance Office?'

'All has been sent back. He wrote two letters—one to the solicitors and the other to the Insurance Company. It is not likely now that anything can be said, because the Directors have accepted the money. Moreover, it appears that they might have proceeded against the lawyers for the recovery of the money, but that they have nothing to do either with you or with Lord Harry Norland. That is a difficult point, however. Somebody, it seems, has compounded—or is going to compound—a felony. I do not understand exactly what this means, or what dreadful consequences might follow; but I am assured by the lawyers that we need apprehend nothing more. All is over.'

Iris heaved a profound sigh.

'Then he is safe?' she said.

'You think of him first,' said Hugh, jealously. 'Yes: he is safe; and, I do hope, gone away, out of the country, never to come

back any more. The more important thing is that you should be safe from him. As for the doctor—but I cannot speak of the doctor with common patience. Let him be left to the end which always awaits such men. It is to be hoped that he will never, wherever he goes, feel himself in safety.'

'I am safe,' said Iris, 'not only from my husband, but from what else beside? You know what I mean. You mean that I, as well as my husband, am safe from that. Oh! the fear of it has never left me—never for one moment. You tell me that I am safe from public disgrace, and I rejoice—when I ought to sink into the earth with shame!' She covered her face with her hands.

'Iris, we know what you have done. We also know why you did it. What need we say more? The thing is finished and done with. Let us never again allude to it. The question

now is—what will you do next? Where will you live?'

'I do not know. I have got Fanny Mere with me. Mrs. Vimpany is also anxious to live with me. I am rich, indeed, since I have two faithful dependents and one friend.'

'In such wealth, Iris, you will always be rich. Now listen seriously. I have a villa in the country. It is far away from London, in the Scottish Lowlands—quite out of the way—remote even from tourists and travellers. It is a very lonely place, but there is a pretty house, with a great garden behind and a stretch of sand and seashore in front. There one may live completely isolated. I offer you that villa for your residence. Take it; live in it as long as you please.'

'No, no. I must not accept such a gift.'

'You must, Iris—you shall. I ask it of you as a proof of friendship, and nothing more.

Only, I fear that you will get tired of the loneliness.'

'No—no,' she said. 'I cannot get tired of loneliness; it is all I want.'

'There is no society at all.'

'Society? Society for me?'

'I go to the neighbourhood sometimes for fishing. You will let me call upon you?'

'Who else has such a right?'

'Then you will accept my offer?'

'I feel that I must. Yes, Hugh; yes, with deepest gratitude.'

The next day she went down by the night mail to Scotland. With her travelled Mrs. Vimpany and Fanny Mere.

CHAPTER LXIV

THE INVINCIBLES

THE proceedings of Lord Harry after he had sent off that cheque were most remarkable. If he had invited—actually courted—what followed—he could not have acted differently.

He left London and crossed over to Dublin.

Arrived there, he went to a small hotel entirely frequented by Irish Americans and their friends. It was suspected of being the principal place of resort of the Invincibles. It was known to be a house entirely given up to the Nationalists. He made no attempt to conceal his name. He entered the hotel,

greeted the landlord cheerfully, saluted the head-waiter, ordered his dinner, and took no notice of the sullen looks with which he was received or the scowls which followed him about the coffee-room, where half-a-dozen men were sitting and talking, for the most part in whispers.

He slept there that night.

The next day, still openly and as if there was nothing to fear, either from England or from Ireland, he walked to the station and took his ticket, paying no attention to what all the world might have seen and understood—that he was watched. When he had taken his ticket two men immediately afterwards took tickets for the same place. The place where he was going was that part of Kerry where the Invincibles had formerly assassinated Arthur Mountjoy.

The two men who followed him—who took their tickets for the same place—who

got into the same carriage with him—were two members of that same fraternity. It is well known that he who joins that body and afterwards leaves it, or disobeys its order, or is supposed to betray its secrets, incurs the penalty of death.

On the unexpected arrival of Lord Harry at this hotel, there had been hurriedly called together a meeting of those members then in Dublin. It was resolved that the traitor must be removed. Lots were cast, and the lot fell upon one who remembered past acts of kindness done by Lord Harry to his own people. He would fain have been spared this business, but the rules of the society are imperative. He must obey.

It is the practice of the society when a murder has been resolved upon to appoint a second man, whose duty it is to accompany the murderer and to see that he executes his task.

In the afternoon, about an hour before

sunset, the train arrived at the station where Lord Harry was to get down. The station-master recognised him, and touched his hat. Then he saw the two other men get down after him, and he turned pale.

'I will leave my portmanteau,' said Lord Harry, 'in the cloak-room. It will be called for.'

Afterwards the station-master remembered these words. Lord Harry did not say 'I will call for it,' but 'It will be called for.' Ominous words.

The weather was cold; a drizzling rain fell; the day was drawing in. Lord Harry left the station, and started with quick step along the road, which stretched across a dreary, desolate piece of country.

The two men walked after him. One presently quickened his step, leaving the second man twenty yards behind.

The station-master looked after them till

he could see them no longer. Then he shook his head and returned to his office.

Lord Harry walking along the road knew that the two men were following him. Presently he became aware that one of them was quickening his pace.

He walked on. Perhaps his cheeks paled and his lips were set close, because he knew that he was walking to his death.

The steps behind him approached faster—faster. Lord Harry never even turned his head. The man was close behind him. The man was beside him.

'Mickey O'Flynn it is,' said Lord Harry.

''Tis a —— traitor you are,' said the man.

'Your friends the Invincibles told you that, Mickey. Why, do you think I don't know, man, what you are here for? Well?' he stopped. 'I am unarmed. You have got a revolver in your hand—the hand behind your back. What are you stopping for?'

'I cannot,' said the man.

'You must, Mickey O'Flynn—you must: or it's murdered you'll be yourself,' said Lord Harry coolly. 'Why, man, 'tis but to lift your hand. And then you'll be a murderer for life. I am another—we shall both be murderers then. Why don't you fire, man?'

'By —— I cannot!' said Mickey. He held the revolver behind him, but he did not lift his arm. His eyes stared; his mouth was open; the horror of the murderer was upon him before the murder was committed. Then he started. 'Look!' he cried. 'Look behind you, my lord!'

Lord Harry turned. The second man was upon him. He bent forward and peered in his face.

'Arthur Mountjoy's murderer!' he cried, and sprang at his throat.

One, two, three shots rang out in the evening air. Those who heard them in the

roadside cabin, at the railway-station on the road, shuddered. They knew the meaning of those shots. One more murder to load the soul of Ireland.

But Lord Harry lay dead in the middle of the road.

The second man got up and felt at his throat.

'Faith!' he said, 'I thought I was murdered outright. Come, Mick, let us drag him to the roadside.'

They did so, and then, with bent heads and slouched hats, they made their way across country to another station, where they would not be recognised as the two who had followed Lord Harry down the road.

Two mounted men of the Constabulary rode along an hour later and found the body lying where it had been left.

They searched the pockets. They found a purse with a few sovereigns; the portrait

of a lady — the murdered man's wife — a sealed envelope addressed to Hugh Mountjoy, Esq., care of his London hotel; and a card-case: nothing of any importance.

'It is Lord Harry Norland,' said one. 'The wild lord—he has met his end at last.'

The letter to Iris was brief. It said:—

'Farewell! I am going to meet the death of one who is called a Traitor to the Cause. I am the Traitor of a Cause far higher. May the end that is already plotted for me be accepted as an atonement! Forgive me, Iris! Think of me as kindly as you can. But I charge you—it is my latest word—mourn not for one who has done his best to poison your life and to ruin your soul.'

In the other letter he said:—

'I know the affection you have always entertained for Iris. She will tell you what she pleases about the past. If she tells you

nothing about her late husband, think the worst and you will not be wrong. Remember that whatever she has done was done for me and at my instigation. She ought to have married you instead of me.

'I am in the presence of Death. The men who are going to kill me are under this very roof. They will kill me perhaps to-night. Perhaps they will wait for a quieter and a safer place. But they will kill me.

'In the presence of Death I rise superior to the pitiful jealousy with which I have always regarded you. I now despise it. I ask your pardon for it. Help Iris to forget the action of her life of which she has most reason to be ashamed. Show that you forgive me—when you have forgiven her—and when you have helped her in the warmth and strength of your love to drive me out of your thoughts for ever. 'H. N.'

EPILOGUE

IT is two years after the murder of Lord Harry Norland, the last event connected with this history.

Iris, when she accepted Hugh Mountjoy's offer of his Scotch villa, went there resolved to hide herself from the world. Too many people, she thought, knew her history, and what she had done. It was not likely that the Directors of the Insurance Company would all hold their tongues about a scandal so very unusual. Even if they did not charge her with complicity—as they could—they would certainly tell the story—all the more readily since Lord Harry's murder—of the conspiracy and its success. She could never again, she told herself, be seen in the world.

She was accompanied by her friend and maid—the woman whose fidelity to her had been so abundantly proved—and by Mrs. Vimpany, who acted as housekeeper.

After a decent interval Hugh Mountjoy joined her. She was now a widow. She understood very well what he wished to say, and she anticipated him. She informed him that nothing would ever induce her to become the wife of any other man after her degradation. Hugh received this intimation without a remark. He remained in the neighbourhood, however, calling upon her frequently and offering no word of love. But he became necessary to her. The frequent visits became daily; the afternoon visits were paid in the morning; the visitor stayed all day. When the time came for Iris to yield, and he left the house no more, there seemed to be no change. But still they continued

their retired life, and now I do not think they will ever change it again.

Their villa was situated on the north shore of the Solway Firth, close to the outfall of the Annan River, but on the west bank, opposite to the little town of Annan. At the back was a large garden, the front looked out upon the stretch of sand at low tide and the water at high tide. The house was provided with a good library. Iris attended to her garden, walked on the sands, read, or worked. They were a quiet household. Husband and wife talked little. They walked about in the garden, his arm about her waist, or hand in hand. The past, if not forgotten, was ceasing to trouble them: it seemed a dreadful, terrible dream. It left its mark in a gentle melancholy which had never belonged to Iris in the old days.

And then happened the last event which the chronicler of this history has to relate.

It began in the morning with a letter.

Mrs. Vimpany received it. She knew the handwriting, started, and hid it quickly in her bosom. As soon as she could get away to her own room she opened and read it.

'Good and Tender Creature,—I ascertained, a good while ago, thinking that probably I might have to make this kind of application to you, where you were living and with whom. It was not difficult; I only had to connect you with Mr. Hugh Mountjoy and to find out where he lived. I congratulate you on being so well able to take care of yourself. You are probably settled for life in a comfortable home. I feel as happy about it as if I had myself contributed to this satisfactory result.

'I have no intention of making myself more disagreeable than I am obliged to do. Necessity, however, knows no law. You will

understand me when I tell you that I have spent all my money. I do not regret the manner in which the money has been spent, but the fact that it has all gone. This it is which cuts me to the heart.

'I have also discovered that the late lamented Lord Harry, whose death I myself have the greatest reasons to deplore, played me a scurvy trick in regard to certain sums of money. The amount for which he was insured was not less than 15,000*l.* The amount as he stated it to me was only 4,000*l.* In return for certain services rendered at a particular juncture I was to receive the half of the insurance money. I only received 2,000*l.*, consequently there is still due to me the sum of 5,500*l.* This is a large lump of money. But Mr. Mountjoy is, I believe, a wealthy man. He will, doubtless, see the necessity of paying this money to me without further question or delay.

'You will, therefore, seek his presence—he is now, I hear, at home. You may read to him any part of this letter that you please, and you will let him know that I am in earnest. A man with empty pockets cannot choose but be in earnest.

'He may very possibly object.

'Very good. In that case you will tell him that a fraud has been committed in connection with which I am prepared to make a full confession. I consented, on the death of my patient, and at the earnest entreaty of Lord Harry Norland, to represent the dead man as his lordship. I then went away, resolving to have nothing more to do with the further villany which I believe was carried on to the obtaining of the whole amount for which he was insured.

'The murder of Lord Harry immediately afterwards caused the Company to drop their intended prosecution. I shall reveal to them

the present residence of his widow, and shall place my evidence at their disposition. Whatever happens I shall make the facts of the case public. This done, nothing can hurt me; while, whether the Public Prosecutor intervenes or not, neither Mr. Hugh Mountjoy nor his wife can ever show face to the world again.

'Tell Mr. Mountjoy, I say, whatever you please, except that I am joking. You must not tell him that. I shall call to-morrow morning, and shall expect to find the business as good as done. 'A. V.'

Mrs. Vimpany dropped the letter in dismay. Her husband had vanished out of her life for more than two years. She hoped that she was effectually hidden; she hoped that he had gone away to some far-off country where he would never more return. Alas! This world of ours has no far-off country left, and, even if the wicked man turneth away from

his wickedness so far as to go to the Rocky Mountains, an express train and a swift boat will bring him back to his wickedness whenever he desires a little more enjoyment and the society of his old friends.

Mr. Vimpany was back again. What should she do? What would Iris do? What would Mr. Mountjoy do?

She read the letter again.

Two things were obvious: first, that he had no clue of the restitution; and, next, that he had no idea of the evidence against him for the murder of the Dane. She resolved to communicate the latter fact only. She was braver now than she had been formerly. She saw more clearly that the way of the wicked man is not always so easy for him. If he knew that his crime could be brought home to him; that he would certainly be charged with murder if he dared to show himself, or if he asked for money, he would

desist. Before such a danger the most hardened villain would shrink.

She also understood that it was desirable to hide from him the nature of the evidence and the name of the only witness against him. She would calmly tell him what would happen, and bid him begone or take the consequences.

Yet even if he were driven off he would return. She would live henceforth in continual apprehension of his return. Her tranquillity was gone.

Heavens! that a man should have such power over the lives of others.

She passed the most wretched day of her whole life. She saw in anticipation the happiness of that household broken up. She pictured his coming, but she could not picture his departure. For she had never seen him baffled and defeated.

He would come in, big, burly, with his

farmer-like manner: confident, bullying, masterful. He would ask her what she had done; he would swear at her when he learned that she had done nothing; he would throw himself into the most comfortable chair, stretch out his legs, and order her to go and fetch Mr. Mountjoy. Would she be subdued by him as of old? Would she find the courage to stand up to him? For the sake of Iris —yes. For the sake of the man who had been so kind to her—yes.

In the evening, the two women—Mrs. Vimpany and Fanny—were seated in the housekeeper's room. Both had work in their laps: neither was doing any work. The autumnal day had been boisterous; the wind was getting higher.

'What are you thinking of?' asked Fanny.

'I was thinking of my husband. If he were to come back, Fanny—if he were to threaten——'

'You would loose my tongue—you would let me speak?'

'Yes; for her sake. I would have shielded him once—if I could. But not now. I know, at last, that there is no single good thing left in him.'

'You have heard from him. I saw the letter this morning, in the box. I knew the handwriting. I have been waiting for you to speak.'

'Hush! Yes, Fanny; I have heard from him. He wants money. He will come here to-morrow morning, and will threaten Mr. Mountjoy. Keep your mistress in her own room. Persuade her to lie in bed—anything.'

'He does not know what I have seen. Charge him with the murder of the Dane. Tell him,' said Fanny, her lips stiffening, 'that if he dares to come again—if he does not go away—he shall be arrested for murder. I will keep silence no longer!'

'I will—I am resolved! Oh! who will rid us of this monster?'

Outside, the gale rose higher—higher still. They heard it howling, grinding branches together; they heard the roaring and the rushing of the waters as the rising tide was driven over the shallow sands, like a mountain reservoir at loose among the valleys below.

In the midst of the tempest there came a sudden lull. Wind and water alike seemed hushed. And out of the lull, as if in answer to the woman's question—there came a loud cry—the shriek of a man in deadly peril.

The two women caught each other by the hand and rushed to the window. They threw it open: the tempest began again; a fresh gust drove them back; the waters roared; the wind howled; they heard the voice no more. They closed the window and put up the shutters.

It was long past midnight when they

dared to go to bed. One of them lay awake the whole night long. In the roaring tempest she had seen an omen of the wrath of Heaven about to fall once more upon her mistress.

She was wrong. The wrath of Heaven fell upon one far more guilty.

In the morning, with the ebbing tide, a dead body was found lashed to the posts of one of the standing nets in the Solway. It was recognised by Hugh, who went out to look at it, and found it was the body of Vimpany.

Whether he was on his way back to Annan, or whether he intended to call at the villa that evening instead of next morning, no one can tell. His wife shed tears, but they were tears of relief. The man was buried as a stranger. Hugh kept his counsel. Mrs. Vimpany put the letter in the fire. Neither of them thought it wise to disturb the mind of Iris by any mention of the man. Some

days later, however, Mrs. Vimpany came downstairs in a widow's cap.

To Iris's look of interrogation she replied calmly, 'Yes. I heard the other day. He is dead. Is it not better—even for him, perhaps—that he should be dead? He can do no more wickedness; he can bring misery into no more households. He is dead.'

Iris made no reply. Better—better far—that he was dead. But how she had been delivered from the man, to what new dangers she had been exposed, she knew not, and will never know.

She has one secret—and only one—which she keeps from her husband. In her desk she preserves a lock of Lord Harry's hair. Why? I know not. Blind Love doth never wholly die.

THE END

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